AUGUSTYN RAMOS HOPE

CRIMSON™

VOLUME **ONE**

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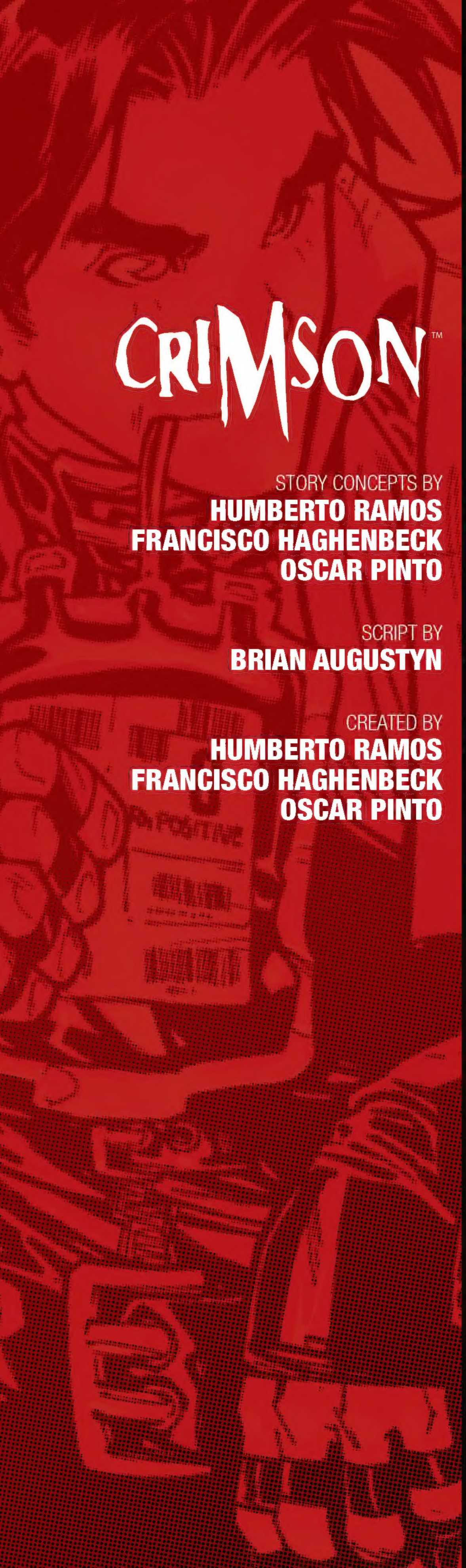

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CHAPTER ONE

DAWN TO DUSK

In the beginning when God began to create Heaven and Earth...

...the Earth was first unformed and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

God said, let there be light and there was light. And God saw that it was good.

And God divided the light from the darkness; calling the light day and the dark night. And this was the first day.

God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters that it may divide the waters from the waters...

...and it was so. God called the expanse sky. And this was the second day.

God said let the waters be gathered in one place, so that dry land may appear. And it was so.

And God called the dry land Earth; the gathered waters seas. And God saw that it was good.

God created behemoths called the Chalkydri to be the guardians of the new born world.

And these were dragons, and they lived through God's glory and kept watch over the Earth.

And God said let the Earth bring forth vegetation; seed-bearing plants, and fruit-trees of every kind on Earth. And it was so.

The Earth gave rise to green life of every kind. And God saw that it was good. And this was the third day.

On the fourth day God said let the seas bring forth swarms of living creatures; and birds that fly above the Earth across the expanse of the sky.

God created the giant sea monsters, and the other creatures, and the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good, and blessed them all and bade them be fertile and increase upon the Earth.

On the fifth day God said let the Earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, wild beasts of every kind, and creeping things.

And it was so. And God saw that it was good.

And God said let us raise up beings who will have dominion over the lower forms. And it was so... but this was not good.

For these, called Grigori, had no souls and would not worship God. And God was displeased, and these fell from his favor.

So God created again. And God made the human in his image, in the image of God were they created; male and female.

God blessed them and bade them be fertile and increase; to fill the Earth and master it. And God gave them reign over all lower creatures that creep upon the Earth.

Another creature there was, who seethed with envy. She was Lisseth. She had been created to mate with the first human, but was not of the same flesh.

Because of this rejection, Lisseth lost her heart and became bitter and jealous.

And as with Lisseth, God seemingly forgot the Grigori, and they fell under the sway of the Evil One. And he began to scheme with them how to reclaim creation.

Before Earth was, God created Angels to help minister to God's creation.

Mighty were these in strength and grace, and near to God were they in power. And the Angels served God in joy and glory.

All the Angels served God, save one called Lucifer, whose name meant 'light of God.' And God loved him, but Lucifer was jealous of God...

...and jealous of God's creation--of all the worlds God had made, full of creatures who loved and worshipped God.

Lucifer desired all this for himself, and had sought to wrest it from God's grasp.

Lucifer sowed seeds of discontent among his fellow angels, and with his God-given light won many to his side...

...and so began a war that shook Heaven itself.

And God saw what Lucifer had wrought and was sore displeased.

God stopped the war and banished Lucifer and his minions from Heaven forever.

Despite his desire and black conceit, Lucifer had not the power to contest against God, and was cast out of God's light and into eternal darkness.

Though he failed in Heaven, Lucifer came to Earth with his seeds of envy. And these seeds bore fruit among the soul-less Grigori.

Humankind was spared the perils of this warfare--by the power of God's love, and the protection of God's warrior Arch-Angels.

Many soul-less ones and Chalkydari perished and their great numbers were vastly diminished. And God grieved for both sides of the conflict.

And Lucifer pitted these against the Chalkydari, who had remained close to God. And great battle rent the peace of all of creation.

In grief, God bade the hostility end, and it ended.

God knew that the creatures had been misled by Lucifer. God forgave them their part in the war, and spared them.

A Grigori who would one day call himself Ekimus survived and escaped into seclusion on Earth. Forever set apart from the humans, forever denied a full measure of God's creation, Ekimus was alone and resentful...

...as was the one called Lisseth. And bitter was her aspect forever.

Humankind was given to freely roam over the whole Earth. And God transformed Eden into a desert, and in the center of this, God placed the Tree of Life to nuture the balance between good and evil in all the world.

The remaining Grigori and many of the Chalkydari were bound by God to remain there and maintain the tree, until such time as they might redeem themselves in Gods sight.

The day would come when these two imperfect beings would come together to breed perfect terror. And all creation would fear the monsters the two birthed in secret over the long eons to follow.

Humankind held dominion over the Earth, but these dark creatures held dominion over the nightmare worlds of the night.

And this was most certainly not good...

NEW YORK, TODAY. 2:00 AM.

UM...IS CENTRAL PARK THE GREATEST PLACE TO BE AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?

RELAX, ALEX, M'MAN--LIKE WHO'S GONNA BOTHER US?

HUGHIE'S RIGHT--THIS TIME'A NIGHT, WE OWN THE CITY! TELL 'EM, DEWIE!

YOU RIGHT, LOUIS--AND ALEX KNOWS IT--HE JUST BUMMED FROM HIS FIGHT WITH LADY JULIE...

...BUT SHE'LL BE COOL--SHE KNOWS ALL ABOUT YOUR BLACK MOODS, DARTH ALEX.

S'NOT FUNNY--THING'S FEEL REAL BAD. AND IT'S NOT JUST JULIE.

I BEEN CHEEZIN' OFF EVERYBODY LATELY--EVEN MY PARENTS. S'LIKE I'M AT THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, WAITING TO FALL...

LIGHTEN UP, ALEX--YOU GOT NO REASON TO BE THIS WEIRD. WORLD'S OURS, MAN, WE GOT NOTHING TO...UM...

VRRRMMMM-VRRMMM

...FEAR?

LOOKA'DIS, M'BATS--WE GOT DINNAH IN DE CAN!

VRRRMMMM-VRRMMM

GOOD THING I STUCK WITH *TRACK*, EVEN AFTER MY *MOODS* STARTED--I GOT AWAY *CLEAN*. BETTER FIND A *COP* OR SOMETHING...

HANT HANT

M' CREW CAUGHT T'REE OF DA *MICE*...BUT WHERE DE *CUTE ONE* GET TO?

AH...DERE HE IS...

...AND HE BE *MINE!*

SCATTER!!

MICE-- HA! SEE DEM *RUN!*

HUNH--?!

YOU FAST L'IL ONE--BUT NOT NEAR FAST ENOUGH TO GET AWAY F'UM *ROSE* DE *PUPPET*, HONCHO O' DE *JELLY BATS!*

AN' ROSE, SHE NEVAH MISS A *MEAL*--'SPECIALLY A *GOOD LOOKIN'* ONE LIKE YOU...

N-NO... *NO...*

...PLEASE...?

NICE 'N' *POLITE*--I LIKE DAT.

I ALSO LIKE WHAT *FEAR* DO TO DA *FLAVAH* O' DE BLOOD...I LIKE DAT DE *BEST!* NOW BE STILL HONEY, ROSE GOTTA *FEED* NOW...

AHHHHHHHH

YAAAAAAHH!

GNNNARRRRU!

RRRRAARRGH!

DON' BE PLAYIN' WIT'CHER *FOOD--FINISH 'EM OFF--* *--NOW!*

AN' FINISH 'EM *ALL* DE WAY--WE DON' WANNA BE MAKIN' NO *COMPETITION!*

WE BE DE *ONLIEST* BLOODSUCKERS IN DIS TOWN FOR SURE!

...GOD ...H-HELP ...M-ME... I...I...

GOD CAN'T HEAR YOU, MEAT! YOU'RE DYIN' *ALONE.*

SCHLUKKK

NOT, *MEAT*-- HEH-HEH --*RAW GROUND BURGER!*

GLLLSSH

AHHH

SCHLUMP

HUGHIE...LOUIE... DEWIE...*GOOD*... LORD...

SSSSPLOX

NIIICE--DAT *MESS 'O' GUMBO* AIN'T NEVER *GON'* COME BACK.

HERE, PUT DIS FAST BOY ON *PUREE* TOO...AN' *HURRY!*

WHAT ARE DOING, FRIEND?

WE JES' HAVIN' A GOOD OL' TI--*HEY*, WHO *YOU*...?!

WAK-K-K

EIGHTBALL--?! WHO...?!

AAAAAAAAAAH-!

THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT.

STAND AWAY FROM THE BOY, SLUT--YOU'LL DO NO FURTHER DAMAGE TO HIM.

WE AIN'T... UM...

...DAT IS...WE AIN'T GONNA STAY 'ROUND HERE AND ARGUE WIT'CHOO ABOUT NO DEAD BOY--TAKE 'EM, YOU WAN' HIM.

EXCELLENT LOGIC...

WE BOOKIN'!

VRRRMMMM

COME, LAD, YOU ARE SAFE NOW...

...THOUGH, IT MAY BE THAT I AM TOO LATE.

WHASSS... HAP'NIN...?

HMM...THAT SCENT--SOMEONE NEW ARRIVES.

AH...BAD NEWS FOR YOU, EIGHTBALL...

HUH...? WHO'RE YOU, WITCH?

KLATCH

SOMEONE YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW, BLOOD-SUCKER...

UK-K-K-HUGGGH?!

...SOMEONE WHO'S GOING TO CRUSH YOU--AND YOUR KIND!

SOMEONE WHO'S ONLY JUST GETTING WARMED UP!

PLEASE!

JUST *ONE* MORE *CHANCE*-- *PLEASE!*

SORRY, SPORT, WE HAVE TO PUT OUR FOOT *DOWN* ON THIS...

...YOUR GRADES HAVE BEEN *DEPLORABLE* OF LATE--AND I WON'T EVEN GET INTO YOUR...*ATTITUDE* PROBLEMS.

ALEX, YOUR FATHER AND I JUST WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU... BUT, HEAVENS, THESE *MOOD SWINGS*--

--LORD...YOU'RE NOT TAKING *DRUGS*, ARE YOU...?!

NO! GOD, MA...D'YOU THINK I'M *STUPID* AS WELL AS A *BABY*?!

AND I *DON'T* HAVE AN *ATTITUDE* PROBLEM. I JUST GET... KINDA *DOWN* ONCE IN A WHILE--AND MY GRADES ARE LOW 'CAUSE JUNIOR YEAR'S *TOUGHER* THAN I EXPECTED...

...SO CUT ME A *BREAK*, HUH?! ALL I WANT IS TO GO TO *ONE* FREAKIN' PARTY!

ALEX ELDER-- HOW *DARE* YOU USE THAT *LANGUAGE* IN FRONT OF YOUR MOTHER AND SISTER?!

YOU CAN FORGET GOING *ANYWHERE, NOW*, MISTER--I OUGHT TO...

OUGHT TO... *WHAT*, DAD-- *HIT ME?*

GO TO YOUR ROOM!

STICK IT-- I'M *GONE!*

NOT NOW, PRIS! I CAN'T LET DAD TREAT ME LIKE A *PRISONER*--I'VE GOT TO GET *OUT*...AND VERY *FAR* AWAY FOR A WHILE...

ALEX...?

I'LL... I'LL...SEE YOU LATER, SIS...

BUT...I DIDN'T... DID I...?

WHAT'RE YOU GUYS WAITING FOR?

LET'S GET *OUT* OF *HERE!*

YES, *SIR*, MISTER ALEX, SIR!

C'MON, *BOSS*--METER'S RUNNING...

GIVE M'MAN SOME SLACK, LOUIS, HE TRYIN' TO SAY THANKS F'R PICKING UP HIS LADY, *JULIE.*

WAY TO GO, ALEX--I KNEW YOU'D GET OUTTA THE HOUSE! HOW'D YOU DO IT?

SIMPLE. I JUST MADE MY PARENTS *HATE* ME.

WAY I LEFT IT, THEY DON'T *EVER* WANT ME *BACK*...NOW LET IT *DROP.*

S'OKAY IF YOU *WANT* TO TALK ABOUT IT, ALEX--I'M HERE...

JULIE... I SAID...

LISTEN, I *DON'T* WANT TO *TALK* ABOUT IT--I DON'T EVEN WANT TO *THINK* ABOUT IT--SO, THANKS, BUT *NO.*

ALEX, I...

I SAID, *NO.* I'M GOING THROUGH...A...*DARK* TIME RIGHT NOW--AND *NO ONE* UNDERSTANDS, NOT EVEN ME...

...SO I DON'T NEED ANYONE...*HANGING* ON ME, TRYING TO *CHEER* ME UP...

...UNTIL I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, IT'D BE BEST FOR *EVERYONE* IF I WAS JUST LEFT *ALONE.* O-KAY?

ALONE MEANS *ALONE*, JULIE... THAT'S HOW I *WANT* IT.

AND NOW, I'M REALLY ALONE, AREN'T I...?

BUT...ALEX, HONEY, YOU DON'T...I...

...ALONE.

HUH?! WH-WHAT'S G-GOING...ON...? FEEL SO...WEIRD...

WHERE AM I...?

A... CHURCH?

A REALLY RUN DOWN CHURCH?

WITH A WHOLE...FLOCK OF...DEAD PIGEONS...?!

IS THIS SOME SORT OF CRAZY DREAM?

ALAS, IT HAS BEEN ALL TOO REAL, YOUNG ALEX...

WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I REFER TO THE HORRIFIC EVENTS IN CENTRAL PARK-- ALL YOU RECALL DID ACTUALLY OCCUR...

...AS DID MUCH WORSE THAT UN-CONSCIOUSNESS SPARED YOU SEEING.

WH-WHO ARE YOU...?

YOUR PROTECTOR, ALEX--SUCH WAS MY PRE-DESTINED DUTY. NOW PREPARE YOURSELF--FOR ALTHOUGH YOU REMAIN INTACT, YOU HAVE CHANGED GREATLY.

BUT THAT *TOO* WAS PREDESTINED!

YOU MAY CALL ME EKIMUS--AND KNOW THAT OUR FATES ARE INEXTRICABLY *LINKED* FROM THIS MOMENT FORWARD.

GOOD... GOD...

INDEED. ELSE YOU'D BE A *SHREDDED CORPSE* LIKE YOUR THREE COMPANIONS.

NO--STAY *AWAY* FROM ME!

I *DO* REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO MY *FRIENDS*--THEY WERE *SLAUGHTERED* BY... *MONSTERS!*

MONSTERS... LIKE *YOU!*

ALEX...STOP THIS FOOLISHNESS. THERE IS MUCH YOU MUST *LEARN.*

I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU *KILL* ME TOO!

ALEX...

=>SIGH<= YOU STILL DO NOT *COMPREHEND,* DO YOU?

YOU CAN *NOT* BE KILLED--SINCE YOU NO LONGER *REALLY LIVE!*

THE ATTACK LEFT YOU COMPLETELY *DEVASTATED,* THERE WAS NO WAY FOR YOU TO *SURVIVE* ALL YOUR INJURIES...

...YOU *"LIVE"* NOW, YES, BUT NOT IN ANY WAY YOU UNDERSTAND...ALEX, YOU ARE NOW AND FOREVER...

...A VAMPIRE!
...?!
...NO WAY... I AM N-NOT...
...NOT...?!
I'M NOT A VAMPIRE!
EN-OH-TEE--NOT!
I WON'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS!
I'M NOT DEAD. I'M NOT A VAMPIRE!
AND I'M NOT STAYING AROUND TO LISTEN TO YOU, YOU...FREAK!
KRRRSSSSH
I'M GOING OUTSIDE--WHERE THE...SANE PEOPLE ARE...
THE DOORS...? NO, ALEX DO NOT GO...
...YOU CAN NOT SURVIVE OUT THERE!
LEAVE ME ALONE, I'M...!

...I'M... BURNING...?!

I'M BURNING!!

HSSSSSSSSSSSSS--

SSSSSS

...MAKES NO SENSE... HURT SO... BAD...FROM...

...SUNLIGHT...?!

AAAARRGH! MAKE IT... STOP... PLEASE...

SSSSSHHHH

SLAM

AHHHH...

HSSSS

HOWEVER BIZARRE, PLEASE ACCEPT THAT FROM NOW ON,

THIS IS YOUR NEW REALITY, ALEX.

NOW REST. IT WILL BE NIGHT SOON..

...COMMON BELIEFS ABOUT VAMPIRES, ARE ESSENTIALLY TRUE. YOU ***MUST*** AVOID SUNLIGHT, AND AS ***DISTASTEFUL*** AS IT SOUNDS, YOU WILL HAVE TO ***INGEST*** BLOOD TO SURV--

--ALEX, ARE YOU ***LISTENING?***

NO. YOU'VE BEEN DRONING ON FOR ***HOURS,*** I'M TIRED OF LISTENING.

AND--BY THE WAY--I WILL ***NEVER*** DRINK ***BLOOD.*** SO FORGET ***THAT.***

THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE ***WRONG.***

YOU HAVE ALREADY ***DRUNK*** BLOOD. IN THE TIME I WATCHED OVER YOU, I FED YOU THE BLOOD OF ***PIGEONS***--YOU ***NEED*** IT TO LIVE!

THAT'S WHERE ***YOU'RE*** WRONG, FREAKSHOW-- I'M ***NOT*** A ***VAMPIRE--!***

AND EVEN IF I ***AM,*** I'D RATHER FACE THE ***SUN*** AGAIN THAN HAVE TO DO ***THAT!***

IT'S ***NOT*** A ***CHOICE,*** ALEX; YOU MUS--

NO! LEAVE ME ALONE!

STOP THIS.

PAF

GET BACK... I'LL HURT YOU--

ENOUGH.

WHOOM!

YOU... YOU...***HIT*** ***ME!***

YOU'LL ***NEVER*** DO THAT ***AGAIN!***

-SIGH-

GOT TO GET...AWAY!
WHERE?!
CENTRAL PARK--?!
A-HUH
A-HUH
A-HUH
YOU MUST BE THE NEWBIE, HEY?
WHO--?
NEW... WHAT?
NEW VAMPIRE, BOBO--WHAT ELSE YOU THINK I MEAN?
I'M NOT A VAMPIRE...!
OOPS, MY BAD--YOU MUST BE ONE OF THEM SABER-TOOTH YUPPIES YA' HEAR SO MUCH ABOUT THEN...
WHAT'S IT TO YOU, ANYWAY? WHO ARE YOU?
I'M JOE, I'M WIT' THE CREW, MAN--I'M VAMPIRO TOO, BOBO...
BUT, DIG--SINCE I KNOW HOW TOUGH THIS C'N BE, I'MO TAKE YOU UNNER MY WING!
SHOW YOU THE ROPES--AND HELP YOU GET PAS' THIS DENIAL TRIP YOU GOT GOIN' ON.
I AM NOT...
YEAH, YOU ARE! SMART VAMPIRES GOT SUMPIN' THEY CALL THE 'SEVEN STAGES OF UNDEATH'--AND YOU AT STAGE THREE!
'VENTUALLY YOU'LL GET TO ACCEPTANCE, TRUST ME--THERE AIN'T A LOTTA CHOICE--
--YOU IS WHAT YOU IS! AND WIT' THAT IN MIND, LET'S GET YOU SUMPIN TO EAT!
I... CAN'T...

S'NOT UP TO *YOU*, BOBO, YOU *GOT* TO DRINK--AT LEAST A *LITTLE*...

...ELSE YOUR *BEAST-SIDE* TAKES OVER AN' YOU'LL GO ON A *FEEDIN' FRENZY! THAT* YOU DON' WAN', B'LIEVE ME...

'BEAST-SIDE'...?

YEP. SEE, FOR US VAMPIROS, TAKIN' BLOOD IS *NATURAL*--AND YOUR *NATURE* WILL ALWAYS SEE YOU GET WHAT YOU NEED, NO MATTER WHAT!

KINDA LIKE BREATHIN' *USED* TO BE, YA' KNOW? NOW THEN, FOLLOW MY LEAD AN' I'LL SHOW YOU THE HOWS...

THOSE MALOS DOWN THERE, F'RINSTANCE--THEY HERE PEDDLIN' *ROCK*--THEY'LL MAKE *PERFECT DONORS*...

...'CAUSE *NOBODY* CARES IF YA' *PREY* ON THE *PREDATORS!*

HOLA, *POPTOPS!*

?!!

YEEE-AHHH...!

SCHLURRRKK

C'MON, BOBO--PLENNY *JUICE* FOR BOTH'A US...!

I'M NOT ENVIDIOSO--NOT *GREEDY*--I SAVE YOU SOME...

...TAKE A *SIP.*

HUAAARRK

SHREDD 'EM!

NO!

I *WON'T*-- LEAVE ME *ALONE!*

STILL IN *DENIAL*--OH WELL, THAT'LL *CHANGE*...

"...BOBO'LL SEE THERE AIN'T NO *CHOICE* AT ALL..."

N-NO...CAN'T BE--I MUST BE CRAZY...!

GOT TO GET AWAY...!

I'VE BEEN RUNNING FOR *HOURS*...AND I'M NOT EVEN A LITTLE TIRED...?

BUT EVEN IF I GO ON FOR ANOTHER *CENTURY* I CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM WHAT'S HAPPENED...

72 ST

...OR RUN *BACK* TO THE LIFE I'VE LOST. MY *GOD*, WHAT HAVE I BECOME...?!

WHERE DO I GO *NOW?* WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF M--

--???

OH NO...

MOM.

DAD.

PRIS.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BOY

CALL (212) 674-7

WE PRAY FOR HIS

I HAVE TO *GO* TO THEM...TELL THEM THAT I'M...*ALL RIGHT*...

...BUT...*AM* I ALL RIGHT? AM I EVEN STILL *ALEX ELDER?!*

GOD...I'VE BEEN FEELING SO SORRY FOR MYSELF--CRYING OVER WHAT *I* LOST--BUT WHAT ARE *THEY* GOING THROUGH? HOW COULD I HAVE FORGOTTEN THEM?!

SAYS THERE I'VE BEEN MISSING FOR A *MONTH?!* MOM MUST BE *DYING...!*

Opening

PRIS...
I-I...

I-I-I-
NNNNGGG--!

MUST...
FEED...!

...THE
...GIRL!

NO!
NOT...
HER!

LORD...
SO MUCH...
PAIN...NNNN--
GOT TO GET
AWAY FROM...
PRIS...!

...?

...ALEX...?

KREECHANK

ARRRR--
I'M... CHANGING--
AWRRRGGGG--

--NNN
--THAT
JOE WAS...
RIGHT!

NAAAARGH!

FEED...
FIND BLOOD...
NOW!

AHROOOOOO--

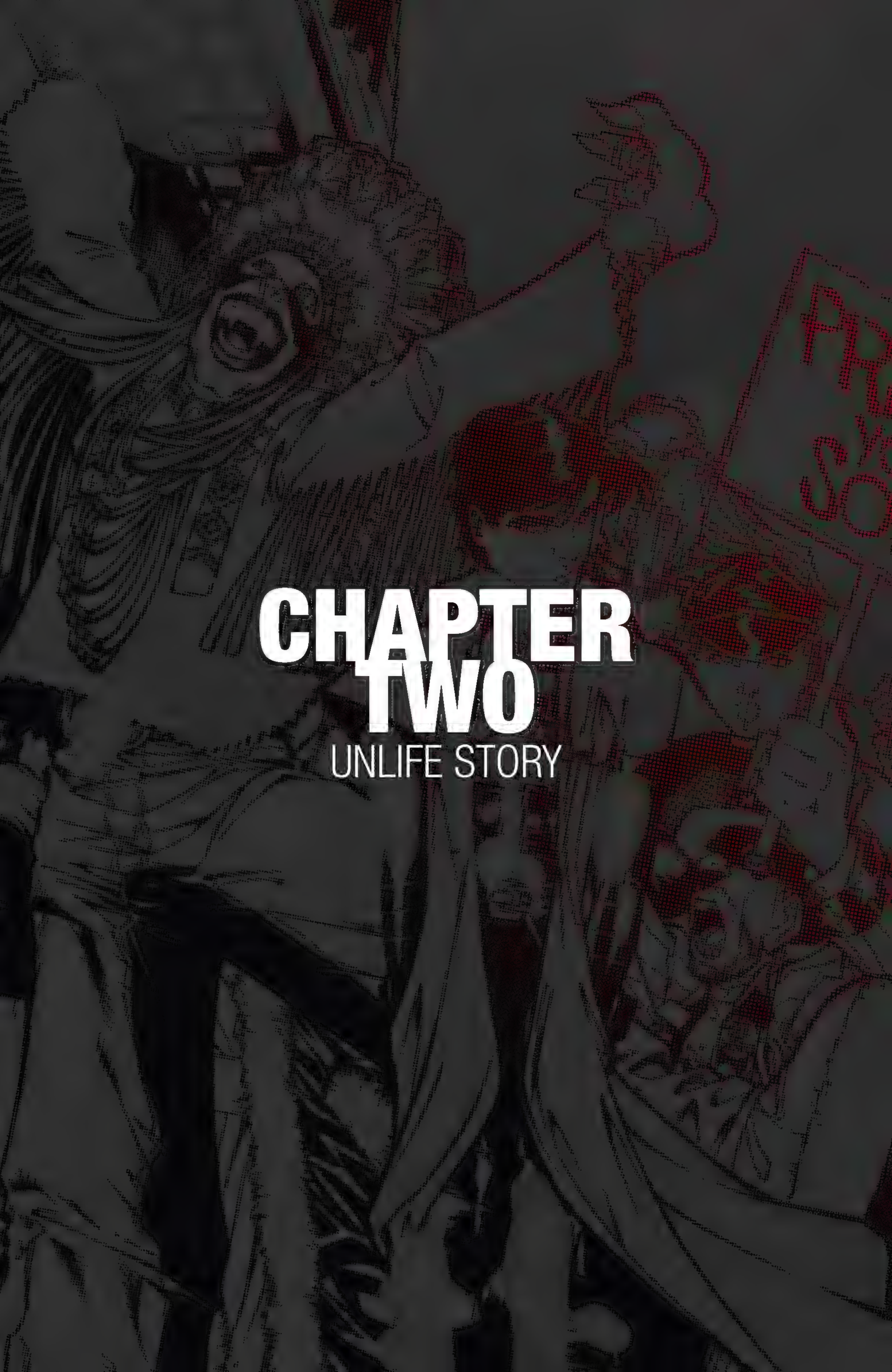
--ROOO-OOOOO--?!

AAAAAH--

SKLASSH!

...PRIS...?

CAUT


CHAPTER
TWO
UNLIFE STORY

A SHORT TIME AGO, **ALEX ELDER** WAS A TYPICAL NEW YORK TEEN--PLAGUED A BIT ACUTELY BY ADOLESCENT ANGST AND FEAR OF THE FUTURE, BUT AN OTHERWISE AVERAGE SIXTEEN YEAR-OLD IN EVERY WAY.

BUT THAT WAS BEFORE HE DIED AND CAME BACK.

A VICTIM OF A HORRIFIC VAMPIRE ATTACK, ALEX HAS BECOME ONE OF THE LIVING DEAD HIMSELF--THOUGH THAT RADICAL NEW REALITY HAS YET TO TRULY SINK IN TO THE YOUNG MAN'S HEAD.

ALEX ELDER, YOU SEE, IS IN DENIAL.

NAAAARRGH!

AND IF YOU'RE A **VAMPIRE**, AND **DAWN** IS ON THE RISE, DENIAL IS A VERY UNWISE PLACE TO BE...

...ALMOST AS UNWISE A PLACE AS A WIDE-OPEN MANHATTAN ALLEYWAY, FOR EVERYTHING YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT VAMPIRES AND THE SUN IS **TRUE**--IT **FRIES** 'EM LIKE BUGS UNDER A MAGNIFYING GLASS!

DENIAL HAS ALSO KEPT ALEX FROM ATTENDING TO ONE VILE, BUT VITALLY IMPORTANT DETAIL OF HIS NEW EXISTENCE...

...DESPITE A GNAWING, DESPERATE, EXCRUCIATING **NEED**, ALEX WON'T DRINK **BLOOD!**

YAHHGG!!

SKRAT-TEER

Raisin Bran

NOW, IN THE GRIP OF A GUT-WRENCHING **FEEDING FRENZY**, ALEX NO LONGER POSSESSES THE COMMON SENSE IT TAKES...

AWRRRKKK-!

...TO COME IN OUT OF THE **SUN!**

...S'OKAY...DON' WANNA *LIVE* LIKE...*THIS*...!

NO MORE... *CHANCES*... GONNA... *DIE*...

PLAYBOY

BUT YOU **MUST**, ALEX...YOU **MUST**...

YOU... AGAIN?!

YES. LIKE YOU, I HAVE LITTLE SAY OVER MY FATE.

HE CALLS HIMSELF **EKIMUS**, LAST SURVIVOR OF A FANTASTICAL RACE OLDER THAN HUMANS--OR VAMPIRES.

IT WAS EKIMUS WHO SAVED ALEX FROM THE MARAUDING BLOOD-SUCKERS WHO CHANGED HIM. AND IT WAS EKIMUS WHO NURTURED THE YOUNG MAN DURING HIS MONSTROUS **TRANSFORMATION.**

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EONS, EKIMUS, AN IMMORTAL ECLUSE, IS **COMPELLED** TO CARE FOR ANOTHER CREATURE...

...AND HE **HATES** IT.

I ***SHOULD*** LET YOU PAY THE PRICE FOR YOUR ***STUBBORNNESS,*** ALEX, BUT I CANNOT--LIKE IT OR NOT YOU HAVE BEEN ***CHOSEN*** FOR A GREAT PURPOSE...

...AND, DAMN ME, SO HAVE I.

FIRST I WILL SEE TO YOUR ***THIRST...***

...THEN GET YOU OUT OF THIS BLASTED ***SUNSHINE*** BEFORE YOU ***ROAST.***

SHK

K

K

DRINK, ALEX...AND ***LIVE...***

...Y-YESSSSS... LIVE...

...***LIVE*** TO FULFILL YOUR ***DESTINY.*** ALEX...

...TO BECOME THE ***LAST*** OF ***YOUR*** KIND.

...MOM...? DAD...?

FORGET THEM, ALEX...THAT LIFE IS BEHIND YOU NOW... ***FOREVER.***

SO, LET ME SEE IF I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE TELLING US, AGENT SULLIVAN...

...AFTER A ***MONTH*** OF SEARCHING, THE ***FBI*** IS NO CLOSER TO FINDING MY SON THAN ON ***DAY ONE?!***

UM...YES, MR. ELDER, THAT'S THE ESSENTIAL FACT. WE'VE FOUND NO TRACE WHATSOEVER OF ALEX...SORRY.

ON THE ***BRIGHT*** SIDE, THOUGH, WE HAVEN'T FOUND A ***BODY*** EITHER.

NICE BEDSIDE MANNER THERE, AGENT MULGREW...

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, OFFICER DAVIS--ANY HOPE, HOWEVER ***BLUNT***, IS SOMETHING TO CLING TO.

YES...BUT IT'S SO ***HARD***...I CAN'T ...***FEEL*** ALEX ANY MORE...AND I ***SHOULD***, I'M SURE OF IT...!

OH, GOD... HE'S...GONE... FOREVER, ISN'T HE?!!

MOM--WE HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT ALEX IS ***OKAY!***

OH, PRIS... I WANT TO, BUT...

MY BIG BROTHER'S ***OUT THERE*** SOMEWHERE, MOM, I ***KNOW*** IT!

I ***CAN*** FEEL HIM WATCHING OVER ME...AND I'M SURE HE ***MISSES*** US A ***LOT!***

YES...WELL, ***FEELINGS***...

...ARE NOT ***FACTS.***

WELL, ***I*** FOR ONE, PLAN ON ***BELIEVING*** RIGHT ALONG WITH HER...

IF I LOST ONE OF ***MINE*** I KNOW I'D NEVER GIVE UP HOPE...NEVER GIVE UP ***LOOKING!***

LISTEN...I FOUND WHAT WAS LEFT OF ALEX'S FRIENDS, AND I'LL NEVER FORGET ***THAT*** HORROR--AND I'LL NEVER STOP SEARCHING FOR YOUR BOY...

...'TILL I'M SURE THE HORROR HASN'T GOTTEN HIM TOO.

ON DUTY OR OFF, MR. AND MRS. ELDER, I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU AND ALEX AS MUCH AS I HAVE.

WELL...THE CASE WILL STAY *OPEN*...AND WE'LL DO WHAT *WE* CAN.

WE'LL BE IN TOUCH.

THANK YOU...

KEEP THE FAITH, PRIS... WE'LL FIND HIM.

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COULD YOU TWO HAVE BEEN ANY MORE *NEGATIVE?*

GIVE US A BREAK, WE WERE ONLY TRYING TO *EASE* THOSE FOLKS INTO FACING... *REALITY.*

YES, SAD BUT *TRUE*--ALEX IS PROBABLY DEAD.

YOU'RE A CITY COP, GEORGE, YOU KNOW AS WELL AS WE THAT AFTER A *MONTH* THE CHANCES OF FINDING A MISSING CHILD *ALIVE* ARE VIRTUALLY *NONEXISTENT!*

SIGH.

I KNOW THE STATISTICS, I CAME HERE TO DO THE SAME AS YOU.

UNTIL I TALKED TO THE LITTLE GIRL.

I DON'T KNOW *WHY,* BUT HER UTTER CONVICTION HAS ME SURE THAT ALEX ELDER *IS* OUT THERE SOMEWHERE...

...AND I'M *GOING* TO FIND HIM...I ...I THINK I *HAVE* TO.

WHATEVER *THAT* MEANS...

"...AND WHEREVER IT TAKES ME."

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST *LEAVE* ME *ALONE?!*

AND, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT--

LET ME DOWN!!

YOU WANT *WILL?* TRY *THIS...*

I *WILL* NOT BE A *VAMPIRE!!!*

...

YOU MIGHT AT LEAST *TRY* TO DEVELOP YOUR VAMPIRIC *POWERS*, ALEX--FOR YOUR OWN SAKE.

FLYING, FOR INSTANCE, IS A MATTER OF SIMPLE *WILL POWER...*

MY LIFE HAS BEEN A *BLISSFUL* ETERNITY OF *SOLITUDE*-- WHY DID I THROW IT AWAY FOR SUCH A STUBBORN *BRAT...?*

YOU WANT *DOWN?* TRY *THIS...*

HEY... *OOOP--!*

THUNCH!

IS *THIS* THE WAY IT ALWAYS IS WITH YOU?! *TORTURE* ME AND THEN JUST *LEAVE*?!

DON'T WALK AWAY FROM *ME!*

AH. *FIRECASTING.*

EXCELLENT, ALEX... EXCELLENT.

ME...? I DID THIS...? *VAMPIRES* CAN DO THIS?!

FWOOSSSSH

THE COMMON VAMPIRE HAS NO SUCH ABILITY. FIRECASTING IS UNIQUE TO *YOU* ALONE.

YOU ARE SOMETHING *NEW*...THE NEXT--AND *LAST*--EVOLUTION OF THE SPECIES...

...AND *THIS* IS BUT A SAMPLE OF ALL YOU WILL LEARN TO DO...

...*IF* YOU WILL ONLY APPLY YOURSELF.

TUMMMP

APPLY MYSELF HE SAYS. EVEN DEAD I CAN'T GET AWAY FROM SCHOOL MARMS...

...AND TELLING ME THE WORLD RESTS ON MY SHOULDERS--NO PRESSURE THERE...

...WHY CAN'T I JUST GO MY OWN WAY...HAVE FUN...?

'EY, BOBO, WHERE YOU GOIN'?

YOU PROB'LY TIRED OF BEIN' COOPED UP WIT' OL' APE-FACE-- HOW 'BOUT WE GO FOR A PROWL IN MY BAT-MOBIL--

--'LESSIN YOU KNOW SOME CORPORATE LAWYERS, IN WHICH CASE, IT AIN'T EVEN MY CAR--

AMERICA'S BLIMPIE

CHINESE VILLAGE

--C'MON, LES' GO FIND US A PAR-TEE--!

AMAZINGLY ENOUGH, JOE, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU. LET'S GO--

NO! NOT IN THOSE PRIEST RAGS...

GOT THE PERFECT THING FOR YOU BACK HERE... SOMEWHERE...

HERE IT IS-- GO OVER IN THE DOORWAY AND TRY THIS ON...

THIS?!

THIS IS PERFECT FOR ME...?

WHERE'D YOU GET THIS--YOU MUG A PORN STAR?

HAW! LIKE A BAMBINO LIKE YOU EVEN KNOWS WHAT A PORN STAR IS!

S'NOT FUNNY, JOE--I FEEL LIKE A BANANA IN THIS THING...

AND, B'LIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU THE LADIES ARE GONNA WANT TA' PEEL YOU...

...AND EAT--

VRUUUUMMMMM-

--I GET IT...THANK YOU.

JUST DRIVE WILL YOU, MR. SUBTLE?

"YOU BET, BOBO--GREENWICH VILLAGE IS JES' THE PLACE FOR A COUPLE TOUGH HOMBRES LIKE US..."

WAT DE MATTER, PHISH--THIS BOY TOO TOUGH FER YOU...?

IRON CROSS LOUNGE

IRON CROSS LOUNGE

THE HUMAN BEAN

MOON DOGGY BURGER

YOU BIN TUSSLIN' WIT HIM FOR A WHOLE T'REE MINUTES.

WHERE DE SPECTACLE? WHERE DE...HUMAN SUFFERING?

YOU WANT SUFFERING, ROSE...?

RRGGH!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAA
...I'LL SHOW YOU SUFFERING.
WHUT TH' HELL'D THAT RATHOLE DO TA' LEFTY?!
SMAKT
LEFTY?!! BWA-HA-HA-HA!
GET 'EM.
OH-OH-- LOOKS LIKE THESE HARD BOYS DON'T FIND THIS TOO FUNNY...
...LOOKS LIKE THEY GONNA MAKE US SORRY...
...I'M ALREADY SORRY--SORRY THERE AIN'T MORE OF EM'! HA!
THWAMM
UKKK--?
C'MERE, HANDSOME...
...CRAZY ELVIRA WANTS A PIECE OF YOU!
AAAAAAH!
SKHHSSSH
OKAY, BATS--WE DIN' START DIS L'IL CONTRETEMPS, BUT WE GON END IT!
KRUNNCH
NO BITIN'--BUT RIP DESE BASIDS TO SHREDS!!
AH...GOOD TIMES...
EEE-HAA! AIN'T THAT RIGHT!
THRMMM

HUMAN BEAN

THE HUMAN BEAN

SOUNDS LIKE THERE'S PLENNY *FUN* DOWN TO THE *IRON CROSS*... LES GO--

--BOBO--? WHASSUP?

C'MON, WE GOTS TO GET TO THE BARS 'FORE ALL THE GOOD LADIES ARE TAKEN...

HEL-*LO*? EARTH TO *ALEX*--?

OH. YOU *ALREADY* GOT'CHURE *EYE* ON A PRETTY LADY, HEY?

WE TALKIN' 'BOUT THE *WAITRESS*, RIGHT? GRRRR-*RROW*... SHE BE *YUM-MEE!*

HUMAN BEAN

DOWN, WOLFY. THAT'S *JULIE RYDER*, SHE'S...A...

...A... *FRIEND.*

OOOH...YOU MEAN *GIRL* FRIEND... DON'CHOO, BOBO?

...A LONG TIME AGO...

HUH? WHO'S THERE--?

ALEX...?

C'MON, STORM-CLOUD--*LIGHTEN UP!* THERE'S *ALWAYS* MORE LADIES AROUND FOR THE *TAKIN'*...

HEE--HEY JOE, WHERE YOU BIN?

WE *MISSED* YOU--TEE-HEE...

OPEN

SPRINGFIELD

DON'T *BROOD*, FER CRI-SAKES...

HEY--?! MY NECKLACE?

UNLAX, SWEETMEAT-- I *NEED* IT.

SNAP

HERE BOBO, *GO* SEE THE GIRL. GIVE HER A *PRESENT*--MAKE SOME POINTS... WHATEVER...

NO.

I *COULDN'T*... SHE THINKS I'M *MISSING*...THINKS I'M...*ALIVE.*

THANKS.

ANYWAY.

YOU GOTTA LEARN HOW TO HAVE *FUN*, AMIGO...

...WHAT SAY WE GO GET SUMPIN' TO *EAT*?

I *TOLD* YOU, I'M *NOT* DRINKING ANY *BLOO--*

--*NO*, NOT THAT KINDA *EAT*. I'M TALKING 'BOUT GETTING A *BURGER* AND A *SHAKE*...?

MOON DOGGY'S GOT THE *BEST* GRILL IN TOWN.

REAL FOOD?! WE CAN EAT *REAL FOOD*?

IN A WAY, BOBO, IN A WAY. C'MON, I SHOW YA'...

IRON CROSS LOUNGE

AAAAAHH--

REAL MONSTERS! RUN!!

MONSTERS? HE DON'T KNOW THE *HALF* OF IT!

HE'S LUCKY HE AIN'T CUT *IN HALF* LIKE SOME OF HIS CHUMS...HEH.

WELL DAT'S ENOUGH *PUB CRAWLIN'* FOR ONE NIGHT, M'BATS-- LET'S GO *TROLLIN'* FOR STRAYS...

VRRRRRM-VRRRRRRMMMMM

OON GGY

CAN'T BELIEVE I CAN STILL ENJOY... *HUMAN* FOOD--ER, UM...YOU *KNOW* WHAT I MEAN...

MAN IT LOOKS SO-O-O-O *GOOD*, I CAN'T WAIT...

THEN, *DON'T*, BWAH--DIVE RIGHT IN.

OH YEAH-- *MMMMPH?*

THAT TASTED LIKE...LIKE...

...NOTHING AT *ALL?!*

PTOOF!

YEAH. SORRY.

YOUR HUMAN TASTE BUDS--AND ALL THOSE NORMAL SENSES--ARE *GONE* FOREVER. BUT THERE *IS* A WAY TO ENJOY IT EVEN MORE...

WHAT? ORDER IT *BLOOD RARE?*

NO, I'M *SERIOUS.* YOU *REMEMBER* WHAT A GREAT BURGER SMELLED LIKE, RIGHT? HOW JUICY AND *DELICIOUS* IT *TASTED?*

A GOOD BURGER WAS LIKE *HEAVEN*, WASN'T IT? YOU GOTTA GO *ZEN*, ALEX-- *CHANNEL* THAT *MEMORY*, *GRAB* IT, AND *RELIVE* IT TO THE *MAX*...

...*THEN* TAKE YOUR BITE! REMEMBERED FLAVOR WILL EXPLODE IN YOUR MOUTH LIKE A *BOMB!*

OH.

MAN. THIS IS...*AMAZING!*

AIN'T IT? THAT'S 'CAUSE YOU'RE TASTIN' EVERY BURGER YOU *EVER* ENJOYED--ALL *AT ONCE*...

...'STEAD OF TAKIN' IT FOR *GRANTED*...LIKE A HUMAN.

TRY THE *SHAKE*. THEN WE'LL HEAD OVER TO CONE'S FOR A *CHILI DOG*--IF YOU C'N HANDLE ABSOLUTE *NIRVANA*--?

YEAH... *FRIES*... OOOH...

VRRRMMMMM.

???!!

IT'S... *THEM!*

UH-HUH, THE *JELLY BATS*-- BUNCHA' ROAD-TRASH, BLOOD-SUCKIN' SCUM.

MAKE MOST *VAMPIROS* ASHAMED TO BE IN THE SAME *FRATERNITY*...

WHAT ARE THESE MALOS TO YOU...?

THEY'RE THE *ANIMALS* WHO *KILLED* MY *FRIENDS*...

...AND... AND...*ME.*

THEY'RE THE ONES WHO *MADE* ME WHAT I AM *TODAY*-- WHO TOOK AWAY *EVERYTHING* I USED TO BE!

I'LL KILL THEM!

WAIT A SEC, BOBO--THAT MAY NOT BE A GREAT IDEA...

...THE BATS ARE COMPLETELY *LOCO*--AND VERY *PELIGROSSO*--DANGEROUS!

YOU GOTTA WATCH YOURSELF, ALEX, THESE PENDEJOS ARE... *BLOOD-THIRSTY!*

YEAH. TELL ME ABOUT IT.

OH WELL, I *WARNED* 'IM. BOBO'S ON HIS OWN NOW...

...CAN'T *WORRY* 'BOUT HIM NOW, I GOT THESE *DEE-LICIOUS* BURGERS TO EN-JOY...

MOVING SO FAST! BUT I'M KEEPING UP WITH THEM...?!

WAS THAT...?

THE HUMAN BEAN

NO. I HAVE TO STOP THIS...

"...AND GET USED TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT ALEX IS GONE...*FOREVER*..."

GRAND CENTRAL STATION. 1:04 AM

...HOPE I DIDN'T SPEND SO MUCH TIME WITH FRANCINE THAT I MISS THE 1:10 TO LARCHMONT...

...I DON'T GET HOME *TONIGHT*, MY WIFE WILL *KILL* ME.

...AND FRANCINE ISN'T WORTH *THAT!*

I CAN FIX IT SO YOUR WIFE CAN'T DO YOU ANY HARM, MISTER...

...AND, UNLIKE FRANCINE, I AM *WORTH IT*...

BELIEVE ME, GIRLIE, MY WIFE LILLIAN'S BIGGER'N BOTH OF US--SHE WANTS ME DEAD THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO STOP HER...

OH, I DUNNO-- I COULD KILL YOU *FIRST*...?

AN' WE COULD *HELP!*

OY.

TAKE DE L'IL *FATTY* DOWN HARD, CHER...

HEY, THAT'S NOT FAIR-- I GOT A *GLANDULAR CONDITION*--NOW GET AWAY FROM ME!

THUMPH

LOOKA DAT. HE SURE MOVE *FAST* FOR A L'IL FATTY.

WITH A GLANDULAR CONDITION, DON'T FORGET.

WON'T DO 'IM NO GOOD, BUT IT *IS* IMPRESSIVE...

LET 'IM RUN A LITTLE, T'INK HE'S GETTIN' AWAY.

DEN WE POUNCE ON THE L'IL RABBIT--AN' AIN'T NOBODY 'ROUND TA STOP US, GAR-*UN*-TEE!

NOBODY BUT ME. IF I KNEW ***HOW***...

DO...ANY A' YOU ***SMELL***... SOMETHIN'... ***DEAD?***

IT'S NEW YORK, ROSE M'LOVE-- EVERYTHING SMELLS THAT WAY...

DON'T WORRY, WE'RE ALL ***ALONE*** WITH OUR CHUBBY SNACK...

A-*HUH*-A-*HUH*-A-*HUH*-A-*HUH*-A-*HUH*.

TO TRAINS

THINK I ***LOST*** THOSE ***FREAKS***-- THANK GOD!

Rent

The musical

DON'T T'ANK ***HIM***--HE'S GON' AN' LEFT YOU RIGHT IN OUR HANDS!

AN' WHAT KINDA GOD WOULD LET US ROAM FREE OVAH DIS WORLD, HMMM--?

SSSNAAAARRRRRLL—

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH HH—

KRONNNCH!

CRUNCH

GNNNNN--!

YUMMMM!

OH...LORD...

HaWOOOOOOO-!

I'VE GOT TO GET *OUT* OF HERE...

NOT SO FAST, HANDSOME...

GOOD PICKIN', ROSIE--LITTLE SLUG WAS *FULL* OF JUICE--*SSSLUUURRP!*

AND ALL THAT *CHOLESTEROL*--UM-*UMMM*, S'LIKE A WELL-MARBLED *STEAK!*

I FOUND THIS LITTLE ONE WATCHING FROM THE SHADOWS LIKE A *PEEPER!*

AND SANDRA BROUGHT DESSERT.

LET ME *GO*, YOU...YOU... WHATEVER THE *HELL* YOU *ARE!*

WHY, I DO B'LIEVE DIS FELLA IS ONE OF *US*. WHAT YOU LOOKIN' FOR, L'IL BRO?

LOOKING TO GET *EVEN*, SUCK-FACE!

LAST MONTH YOU ATTACKED ME AND MY FRIENDS IN CENTRAL PARK--*SHREDDED* THEM AND LEFT ME... LIKE *THIS*--LIKE *YOU!!*

DAT WAS *YOU?* I *DO* 'MEMBER THE *FUN*, BUT *NOT* YOU, MON CHER--SORRY, BUT FOOD'S FOOD, AFTER ALL...

BUT YOU WAN' A PIECE OF ROSE, L'IL BOY--*BRING IT ON!*

YAAAHAKRRRR!

WHHH-SSSHKKK

OOO, YOU NOT *NEAR* FAST ENOUGH, YET, SUGAH...

ARRRGH!

YOU *SHOULD* BE T'ANKIN' ME, I *MADE* YOU NEW AN' *BETTAH* THAN YOU WAS--WHY, I'M LIKE YOU *MOMMA* NOW!

AHH...HOW SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH TO HAVE A *UNGRATEFUL* CHILE--HEH-HEH-HEH...

IN MY *GENEROSITY*, I LET YOU BE--WE COULD'A MADE *GUMBO* A'YOU, LIKE WE DID WIT'CHER FRIENDS--

--BUT, I FIGGER, WHAT HARM CAN A L'IL FELLA DO? NOW YOU WAN' MAKE *TROUBLE* FOR ROSE AND THE BATS? TSK-TSK...

I *WANT* TO SEE YOU *DEAD*, *BITCH!*

AN' NOW YOU CALLIN' NAMES? WHAT KINDA UPBRINGIN' YOU HAVE, BOY?

SSSSSNNRRRRLLLLL...

WELL, I *BROUGHT* YOU INTO DIS *NIGHT-WORLD*, SONNY...

...AND I C'N TAKE YOU *OUT* OF IT-- *ANYTIME...!!*

...LIKE *NOW!!*

NO MORE *MISTAKES--OFF* WIT' HIS *HEAD!!!*

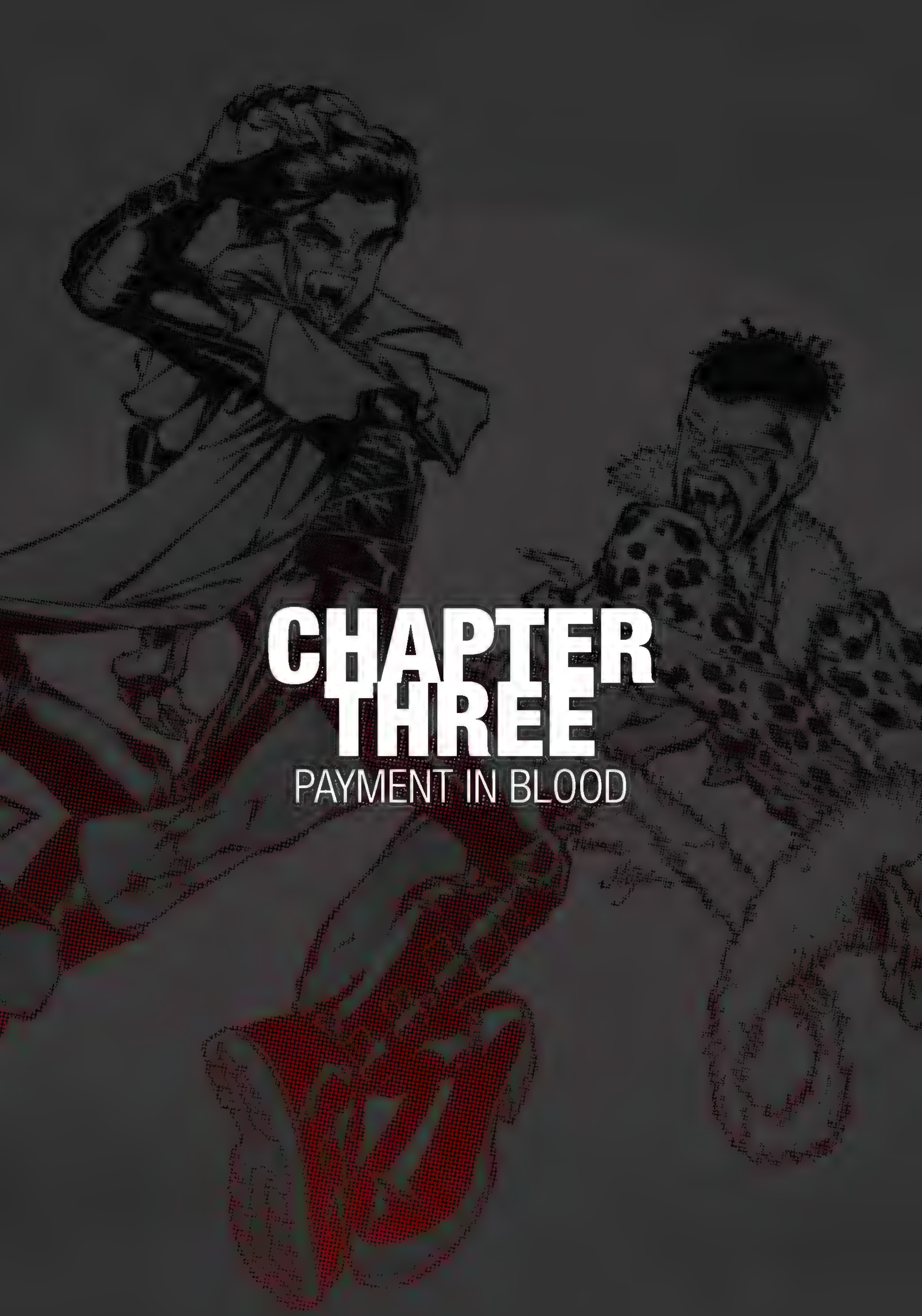
EYE ON A
DY, HEY?

E TALKIN'
HE WAITRESS,
TIGER-ROW...
YUM-MEE!

DOWN.
FY. THAT'S
IE RYDER.

KUMA

BEAN


CHAPTER
THREE
PAYMENT IN BLOOD

NO MORE MISTAKES-- OFF WIT' HIS HEAD!!

NOT LONG AGO, SIXTEEN YEAR-OLD **ALEX ELDER** HAD A RECURRENT DREAM THAT PLAGUED HIM. IN IT, HE SHOWED UP FOR HIS PROM **STARK NAKED--**

--IMMEDIATELY **AFTER** SWIMMING IN **ICE COLD** WATER. THE HORROR, THE **HORROR...**

UNTIL RECENTLY **THAT** WAS THE WORST **NIGHTMARE** ALEX HAD EVER FACED...

...BUT THAT WAS BEFORE HE AND HIS FRIENDS WERE ATTACKED AND KILLED BY THE **VAMPIRE** CYCLE-GANG KNOWN AS THE **JELLY BATS**--LED BY THE TWISTED-SISTER WHO CALLED HERSELF **ROSE THE PUPPET**... **BEFORE** ALEX ROSE AGAIN AS AN **UNDEAD BLOODSUCKER** HIMSELF.

WHEN HE'D TRACKED DOWN AND ATTACKED THE GANG, HE'D HOPED TO AVENGE THIS NIGHTMARE-LIFE HE WAS NOW CURSED TO LEAD...

...ONLY TO QUICKLY DISCOVER THAT ROSE HAD EVERY INTENTION OF **ENDING** THAT LIFE--THIS TIME FOR GOOD--WITHOUT ANY MORE **REPRIEVES.**

NIGHTSTALKER CARL KOLCHAK GOT IT RIGHT, BY THE WAY-- A HEADLESS VAMPIRE IS A DEAD VAMPIRE...

WHHHHHH

...AND WHILE ALEX HAS NO LOVE FOR HIS NEW AND DESPERATELY MISERABLE EXISTENCE, HE'S NOT QUITE READY TO DIE YET, EITHER...

...NOT UNLESS HE CAN TAKE HIS ENEMIES WITH HIM!

NO! I CAME HERE TO KILL YOU, WITCH-- AND I SWEAR I'LL LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE THAT HAPPEN!

BIG TALK FOR A L'IL BOY WIT' NO WAY OU--HUH?!

YOU CAN'T SLASH WHAT ISN'T THERE...!

DUCKED--?!

NO-oOOOo!!

CHLUK-K-K

THE LONG, VICIOUS UNLIFE OF THE BLOOD-LUSTING THUG, ONE-EYED PHISH ENDS WITH THREE BOUNCES AND A WET SPLAT ON THE FLOOR OF NEW YORK'S GRAND CENTRAL STATION.
IT IS MORE DIGNITY THAN HE DESERVES.
PHISH...I DIN'T MEAN...I-I...
OH, CHER... YOU WERE A... FAVORITE...
SHRED THE L'IL BAST'ID!!
BRING IT ON, SCUM--BUT I'LL TAKE MORE OF YOU WITH ME WHEN I DIE!
FORTUNATELY, ALEX WON'T HAVE TO PUT HIS BRAVADO TO THE TEST...
--JOE?!
SNEAKER
32

GET IN THE CAR, BOBO-- NOW!

THESE *FREAKA-DEAKS* WON'T BE FLAT-FOOTED FOR LONG!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE...THANKS...

SKREEEEEEE

VRMMMMMMMMM

DIS IS ONLY *STRIKE ONE*, BOY-- DE BALLGAME AIN'T NO WAY *OVER*...

...NOT 'TILL *ROSE DE PUPPET* WIN DE DAY!

WHERE TO...?

THE *CHURCH*, I GUESS...

SKREEEEEE

SK EERK

TUMMP!

NO PROB...

HONNK HONNK

TO MOST OF US, THE DAY PASSES TOO QUICKLY...

...BUT NOT QUICKLY ENOUGH FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ONLY FOR THE NIGHT...

...FOR THEM, THE SUN CRAWLS ACROSS THE SKY WITH GLACIAL SLOWNESS.

BUT HOPED-FOR DARKNESS FINALLY FALLS ON THE CITY, AND WITH IT COME BRAND NEW PROBLEMS...

ALEX AND I *NEED* THEM TO *LIVE* DURING THE *DAYTIME*, JEFE!

WHAT ARE THESE BOXES DOING HERE?

NO ONE *NEEDS TELEVISION* TO SURVIVE, FOOL-- *REMOVE* THIS CLUTTER, IMMEDIATELY!

VCR-THOO

SATELLITE DISH

AI-YI-YI... ¡ESTÁ MUY *LOCO*...!

HOW YOU 'SPECT US TO LIVE IN THIS DRAFTY PILE WITHOUT THE BASICS, MAN?!

WE GOTTA HAVE SOME SORTA *DIVERSION*, DON' WE...UM...MR. *EKIMUS*...SIR...?

NO.

AND *WHEN* EXACTLY DID I INVITE YOU TO *STAY?*

HELP ME OUT HERE, BOBO...

YOU'RE DOING *FINE*, JOE.

SO, EKKIE-- WHERE'S THE *CABLE HOOK-UP?*

NOWHERE. NOW GET THIS USELESS TRASH OUT OF HERE...

IT'S *NOT* USELESS, *APE-FACE!*

SKA-VOOM!

NOW IT IS.

OH-NO-O-O-O--THAT WAS *EXPENSIVE* GEAR, MAN...!

OKAY, JOE WAS WAY OVER-THE-TOP.

BUT WHY *CAN'T* WE MAKE THIS PLACE A *LITTLE* MORE *LIVABLE?*

FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT WE DO NOT *LIVE.*

GET USED TO IT, ALEX.

...RAZZA-FRACKIN, RAT-SHUCKIN, MUTTER-PUTTER...TREAT A GUEST LIKE THAT...I NEVER...!

SLAMMMMM

I DO NOT WISH TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION AGAIN. UNDERSTAND?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND *ANYTHING* ANYMORE.

EXCEPT THAT SINCE ROSE AND HER MONSTERS KILLED ME, I'VE *LOST* EVERYTHING-- AND EVERY*ONE*-- IMPORTANT TO ME...

...AND IT JUST KEEPS GETTING *WORSE.*

YOU *WILL* FORGET THEM IN TIME, ALEX.

I DON'T *WANT* TO FORGET THEM, EKIMUS! I *LOVE* THEM...!

AH...WHAT WOULD *YOU* KNOW ABOUT *THAT?*

YES.

WHAT INDEED?

ALEX, THERE IS *NOTHING* I CAN SAY TO YOU, EXCEPT THAT YOU *MUST* TRUST ME...

...YOU ARE THE *CHOSEN ONE--*

NO, PLEASE. NOT THAT AGAIN...

I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* TO TRUST...OR BELIEVE. I CAN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND THE THINGS I'VE SEEN WITH MY OWN EYES...

...I'M GOING TO GO BE ALONE FOR A WHILE. MAYBE THE ANSWERS WILL COME TO ME IN A *VISION.*

YEAH, RIGHT.

...HAVE YOU SEEN HIM... *PLEASE*...?

EXCUSE ME, PLEASE--MY NAME IS *JULIE RYDER*...? MY...WELL HE'S MY *BOY FRIEND*, HAS BEEN *MISSING* FOR MORE THAN A *MONTH!*

THIS IS WHAT ALEX LOOKS LIKE...HAVE YOU SEEN HIM? *SIR*...?

GOTTA DIME?

LET ME SEE THAT, CHILD... I'LL KEEP MY EYES OPEN.

THANK YOU... UH... MISTER.

HMM, *HANDSOME* BOY--GOOD LUCK FINDING HIM, SWEETHEART...

THANKS... EXCUSE ME, HAVE *YOU* SEEN THIS GUY?

'COURSE IF *ROSE* GETS TO HIM FIRST, THERE WON'T BE ANY*BODY* LEFT TO FIND!

FIND DAT L'IL MONSTER NOW!!

HE GON' PAY FOR TAKIN' MY SWEET PHISH FROM ME!

ROSIE, ROSIE, ROSIE--WHAT'S THIS, A SENTIMENTAL STREAK? OVER A REPLACEABLE MAN?!

MEN ARE LIKE ROACHES, ROSIE--ALWAYS MILLIONS WAITIN' TO GET SQUASHED!

SHUT'CHER YAP, ELVIRA.

BA-DEEP

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

EEERP

DWEEP

AND SLIME LIKE PHISH, WILL BE EASY TO REPLACE. YOU COULD MAKE SNEAKER HERE YOUR NEXT CONSORT, F'RINSTANCE--ROCK HIS LITTLE WORLD!

HUH...?

OR MAYBE YOU'D RATHER TAKE UP WITH SOME NEW BLOOD--LIKE MAYBE THAT CUTE LITTLE NEWBIE FROM THE TRAIN STATION...?

I WON' SAY IT AGAIN, ELVIRA--SHUT UP OR DIE!!

WHAP

AN' DON' EVEN *MENTION* THAT RATHOLE T'ME--HE MADE ME KILL MY SWEET MAN

AN *DATS* JUST PART O' WHY I HATE HIS LI'L BLACK *SOUL!*

SKLATTER

SPEED LIMIT 50

MY, MY...I'VE NEVER KNOWN YOU TO GET SO *WORKED UP*, ROSIE--'SPECIALLY OVER A DEAD MAN...METHINKS YOU *PROTEST* TOO MUCH!

MAYBE YOU GOT THE *HOTS* FOR THIS BOY YOU BROUGHT INTO OUR WORLD...?

WHOOMP

S'ALMOST *INCEST*--OOOH, *KINKY*--OOOF!!

HE *AIN'T* MINE--*SOMETHIN'S* ALREADY... *TURNED* HIM!

HE SOME...*NEW* KINDA THING...AN' IF I CATCH HIM--I'LL *SHRED* HIM LIKE SUSHI!

THEN IT DON'T MATTER WHAT I *FEEL.*

GOOD NEWS, ROSE--I THINK I GOT JUST THE *BAIT* TO REEL IN YOUR PHISH-KILLER!

...MAN GONNA TAKE MY HARD EARNED *ELECTRONICS* AWAY F'M ME? I DON' THINK SO...

...HAD TO TAKE OUT *THREE* BURGLARS BEHIND THE WIZ, JES' TO SNATCH THAT SLAMMIN' SET-UP! THEY DIN'T *TASTE* GOOD NEITHER--TOO MUCH *GARLIC!*

HONK-HONK-HONK HONK-HONK-HONK

WHAT'S THE *HOLD-UP?* COME ON, AWREADY--IT'S *TWO AYEM!!*

BEEP-BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

HO-O-O-ONNNNK

MEEEP MEEEEEP

MEEEEEEP MEEEP

HMM, SOME KINDA EXCITEMENT IN FRONT OF SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL--THIS TIME'A NIGHT?

BEEP

'COURSE *THAT'S* WHY I LOVE BEIN' IN THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS--NEW YORK, NEW YO-O-O-ORK--ALWAYS SOMETHING *JUMPIN'!*

DANG--CAN'T SEE...

MAN, WHAT A *MESS.*

PRETTY *HOT*--FOR A *DEAD* GIRL...

'SCUSE *ME*--COULD I SEE WHASSUP--*PLEASE?!*

CARAMBA, SOMEONE DID A NUMBER ON THAT POOR L'IL GAL, SHE'S--

MADRÉ...

"OH, ALEX, IT JES' KEEPS GOIN' BAD..."

IS ANYONE *OUT* THERE LISTENING TO ME...?

GOD...OR... WHATEVER...?

DO YOU STILL PAY ATTENTION, OR IS AN ABANDONED CHURCH *OFF-LINE* TO YOU?

OH, MAN... WHY AM I BOTHERING?

IF THERE WAS A GOD, WOULD ALL THIS TERRIBLE CRAP BE HAPPENING TO ME?

STILL, EKIMUS SAYS I'M THE *CHOSEN ONE*, SO I HAVE TO ASK...

...WHAT FOR-- AND WHY ME?!

CAN I PLEASE HAVE SOME *ANSWERS*...?

UM, ALEX...?

OH, HEY, JOE-- I WAS JUST TALKING TO THE GOD WHO ISN'T THERE.

OH, GOD'S *THERE* ALL RIGHT, JUST SOMETIMES IT DON'T SEEM LIKE IT--TIMES LIKE *NOW*...

...

WHAT IS IT?

BAD NEWS, M'MAN...REAL BAD...

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT, JOE? TELL ME...

I...I CAN'T-- 'SIDES YOU'LL SEE IN A SEC....

WHAT'S THIS...? A MURDER SCENE... BUT--

NO.

DO NOT CROSS • POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS • POLICE LINE DO NOT CR

EYOUISENTHISBOY

IT'S...IT'S JULIE?!

DEAD...?!

...N-N-NUH... N-NO-O-O-O... PLEASE...

B'LIEVE IT SUGAH.

THE JELLY *BATS?! THEY* DID THIS!

LOSE SUMP'IN, BAY-BEE...?

NOW WE *EVEN,* CHILE. BUT ROSE AIN'T DONE WIT'CHOO YET.

DIS AIN'T EVEN A *TASTE* OF HOW BAD IT'S GONNA GET--I GUAR-UN-*TEE!*

WHAT DE *HELL...?*

KRAAAAAAABBBBBBT!

KAVOOOOM!!

AAAAARRRGH!!

UNNGH!

ELVIRA...?! HOW...?!

WE NOT GONNA STAY 'ROUND TO FIN' OUT...

WE'LL... UM, GET THE BOY LATER.

DON'T KNOW HOW TO TELL YOU THIS, BOBO, BUT VAMPIRES *CAN'T* DO THIS KINDA STUFF...

I CAN.

I'M GOING AFTER HER...

MOVE! HEAD F'R THE PARK!

HE DA ONE L'IL GUY WHO JES' MADE FIFTH AVENUE GO VESUVIUS, CHUMP-- LIKE I SAY BEFORE, DIS ONE IS SUMP'IN BRAN' NEW!

WE GONNA GET HIM, ALL RIGHT-- BUT ONLY ON OUR OWN TURF!

WHY WE RUNNIN' AWAY FROM *ONE* LITTLE GUY--WE SHOULD BE TRASHIN' *HIM!*

SWWAAAARRRLL!

YOU'RE GOING TO *PAY*, SCUM-- ALL OF YOU...!!

YAAAH!

THUMPH

...IN BLOOD!

YOU COULD'VE LEFT ME AND MY FRIENDS *ALONE* THAT NIGHT, ROSE--COULD HAVE *PREYED* ON SOMEONE ELSE...*THAT* WAS *STRIKE ONE!*

YOU COULD'VE LEFT *JULIE* ALONE TONIGHT-- *STRIKE TWO!*

YOU *SCREWED-UP* HUGE WHEN YOU MADE ME WHAT I AM, FREAK-- *STRIKE THREE,* YOU'RE DEAD!!

ARRRGGH!

SLLISSH

THWAKK

NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, BO, YOU STILL A *AMATEUR!*

AND ROSE IS DE *QUEE--UNNNG!*

THAT WAS YOUR LAST *SHOT,* JUNIOR--AND NOT NEAR GOOD ENOUGH...

HANG ON, ROSE-- BEING SOMETHING *NEW* AIN'T GONNA *SAVE* THIS CHUMP FROM A *DOUBLE TEAM!*

...NOW I GON' TURN YOU INTO GERBIL-CHOW...

VRRRRRMMMM

SKRRISSH

THEN LE'S EVEN THE *SCORE*, PRINCESS!

???!!

THUNKK!!

UNNNN—

KRUNKK!!

ENJOY THE *RIDE, PUNKIN'*...

...AN' YOU THOUGHT YOU *KNEW* WHAT *ROUGH TRADE* WAS.

CHUDDD

LOOKS PAINFUL--GONNA TAKE THE *JAWS OF LIFE* TO GET YOU FREE.

CRASH ISN'T GOING TO *FINISH* ME, AND WHEN I GET *LOOSE*, I'LL SHOW YOU MY JAWS OF *DEATH!*

BET YOU SAY THAT TO ALL THE BOYS.

BUT I KNOW SUMTHIN' THAT WILL FINISH YOU.

SHUNK FWOOF

LITTLE *HIGH-TEST*... LITTLE *ZIPPO*--MIX 'EM TOGETHER, WHAT'YA GET?

FIRE.

BAWHOOOM!

EXACTAMENTE.

YOU HOWLIN' 'BOUT *OFFIN'* ME, AND *THIS* IS ALL YOU *BRING*--ROSE DON' GO DOWN THAT *EASY!*

I BEEN DOIN' THIS *THREE-HUNDRED YEARS*-- HOW YOU FIGURE TO BEAT *THAT?!*

'SPECIALLY SINCE YOU AIN'T LIVIN' ANOTHER *DAY!*

I GON--OWWWWW!!

ZZZZZ-TUNK

ZZZZZ-TUNK

WHA-- *WHO--?!*

SACRE... ONLY GOT *ONE* OF THEM?!

ROSE...? *ROSE?!*

I'M *COMIN'*, ROSE...!

YOU CAN'T HELP *HER*, FOOL...

...YOU CAN'T EVEN HELP YOURSELF.

OH, SHIII--

SPLUTCHK

ARROWS KNOCKED HER BACK INTO THE WATER--IS SHE... DEAD...?

NO SUCH LUCK, PUNK--

YOU GON' DIE SCREAMIN'-- JES' LIKE YOUR SOW, JULIE!

BAD MOVE, UGLY-- REMINDING ME OF JULIE ONLY FIRED ME UP AGAIN...

...AND NOW I'M GOING TO BURN YOU DOWN!

SKLIKSH!

UK?

GAME OVER, BITCH!

HOW ABOUT *THAT*? SHE DID HAVE A *HEART*.

FSSSSSSSS

I WON?

BOBO!

YOU *DID* IT--THE *QUEEN VEE* IS *DEAD*--AND *YOU* WHACKED HER!

ONLY ABOUT *TEN-THOUSAND* DEATHS TOO *LATE*--BUT *YEAH*, I KILLED HER.

ISN'T THAT WHAT WE *VAMPIRES* DO?

YOU SAID, *VAMPIRE*--? BOBO--YOU AIN'T IN *DENIAL* ANYMORE!

YEAH. YIPPEE.

...UNEXPLAINED **EXPLOSION** AND **FIRE** IS SUSPECTED TO BE CONNECTED TO THE MURDER OF A TEEN-AGE GIRL FOUND ON THE STEPS OF ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL LAST NIGHT. POLICE SUSPECT DRUG RELATED MOTIVES...

abc

KLIK

BILL, PRIS? DINNER'S *READY*.

OKAY, HON--I WAS JUST CATCHING THE LOCAL NEWS. I HEARD *CENTRAL PARK*, AND I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE ABOUT THE SEARCH FOR ALEX...

...BUT I CAN'T *IMAGINE* ALEX BEING MIXED UP WITH NASTY BUSINESS LIKE THAT.

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT--

--PRIS... *WHO* ARE YOU WAVING TO?

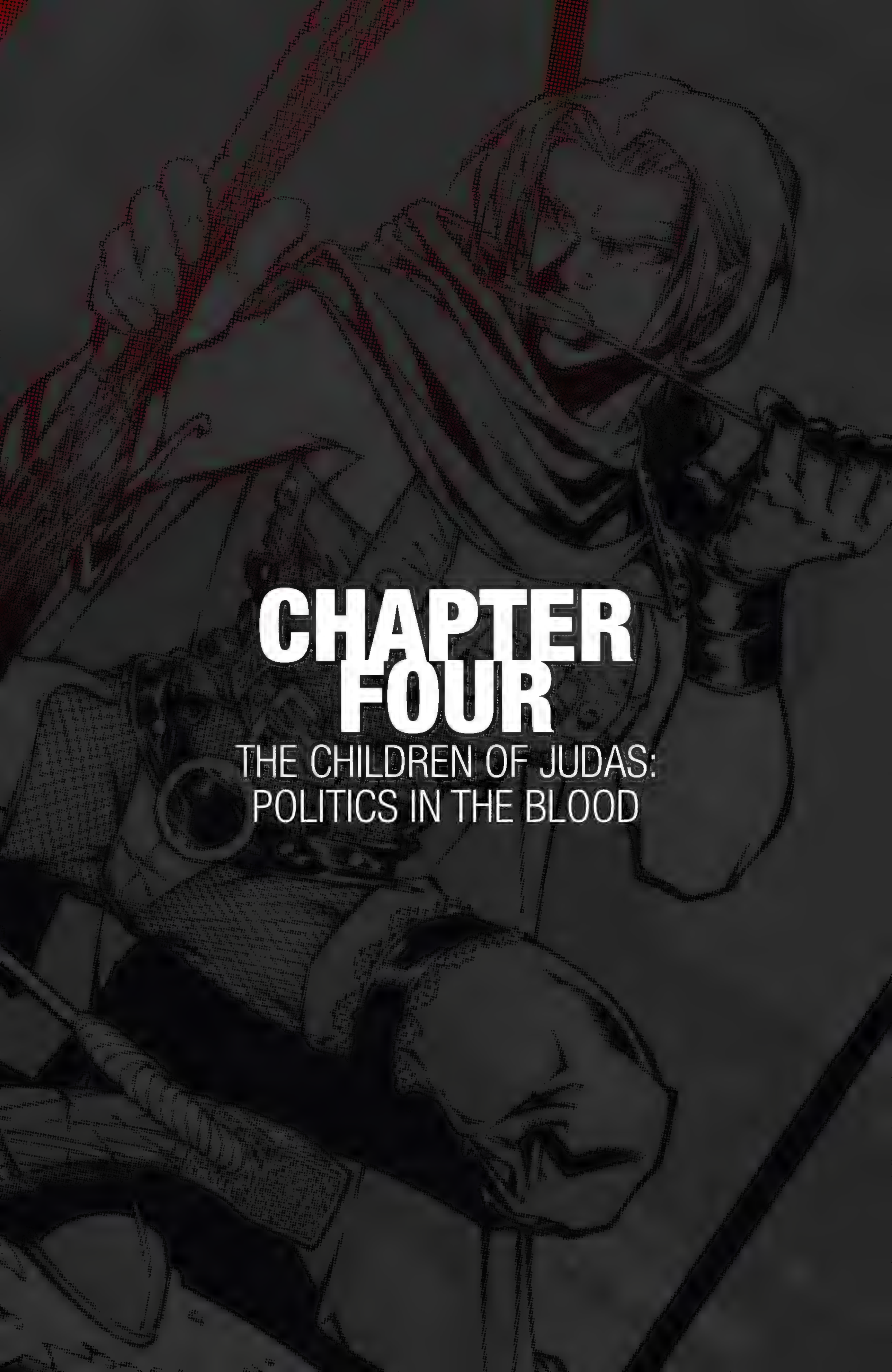
ALEX.

THAT'S *SWEET*, DEAR-- AND WE ALL *HOPE* HE'S OUT THERE...

HE *IS*... I *KNOW* IT.

BLESS THIS MEAL, LORD...AND OUR FAMILY. ALL *FOUR* OF US...

NOW
READ ON!


CHAPTER
FOUR
THE CHILDREN OF JUDAS:
POLITICS IN THE BLOOD

WAR LOG ENTRY -- FROM ROUGE, OF THE ORDER OF THE RED HOOD.

WE WERE JUST OUTSIDE OF LAS VEGAS, ON THE TRAIL OF SOME RENEGADE WILDLIFE, BUT WERE ALREADY PICKING UP THE SCENT OF SOMETHING FAR LARGER.

JOSHUA FLATS TRAILER COURT

AROOOO

MY PARTNER SCARLET WAS ALWAYS BETTER AT THIS THAN I -- SHE SAW THE CLUES FIRST...

FER CRY-EYE -- SHADDUP, ALREADY!

JERRY LIVES!

GRATEFUL DEAD

SNNNRRRRL

DAMN COYO -- OHMIGOD!

...IT WAS SHE WHO SAW THE VAST WEB OF CONNECTED EVENTS!

BEFORE WE COULD UNRAVEL THE MYSTERIES, HOWEVER, THERE WERE BEASTS TO KILL.

THERE ARE ALWAYS BEASTS TO KILL.

BUT THESE CREATURES WERE A CLUE IN AND OF THEMSELVES -- THEY WERE CREATED BY SOMEONE OF GREAT MYSTIC POWER! SOMEONE IT WOULD BE OUR DUTY TO BRING DOWN.

KRAAHKRR

CHUK

AARR-UKK-k

IT IS TRUE THAT NONE OF THIS **STARTED** THERE IN THE NEVADA DESERT, BUT IT **WAS** THERE THAT WE FOUND THE FIRST THREADS OF **TRUTH.**

AND, FOR GOD AND CREATION, **TRUTH** WAS OUR **GRAIL!**

SCARLET IS ALSO THE BETTER SOLDIER. SHE IS, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, UTTERLY WITHOUT **FEAR.**

TWANG

TWANG

TWANG

AND FACING THOSE SLAVERING JAWS WITHOUT DREAD WAS A FEAT I COULD NOT MATCH.

TWANG

I HAVE TRULY BECOME TOO OLD AND SOFT FOR THIS ENDLESS BATTLE.

SCARLET, THOUGH, IS AS VITAL AND DRIVEN AS EVER. AND AS BEAUTIFUL.

AND A BIT TOO FOND OF **TROPHIES.**

SKISSSSH

NOW, HOBIE -- TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW THAT BROUGHT THESE ***BEASTIES*** TO YOUR DOOR?

AND WHAT THE OLD MAN TOLD US LED US TO NEW YORK CITY...

WAYNE SHOOTS...

...AND SCORES!

AND THE NEW YORK RANGERS GO ON TO DEFEAT THE TRENTON TIMBERWOLVES BY A SCORE OF FOUR TO ONE!

¡CARAMBA! WHAT A GREAT GAME -- FABULOSO!

GREAT SEATS, TOO, JOE -- TOO BAD WE CAN'T GET VENDORS WAY UP HERE...

I TELL YOU THIS, ALEX, THIS IS SOMETHING -- I LOVE HOCKEY, YOU LOVE HOCKEY -- WE'RE DESTINED TO BE GREAT AMIGOS -- HEY?!

WE SHOULD PLAY SOMETIME... YOU CAN BE THE LONE RANGER...

...AND I'LL BE TONTO -- ON ICE!

HA HA HA HA HA!

THOUGHTS OF ADVENTURES SHARED WITH GOOD FRIENDS CAN DISTRACT ONE FROM THE GRIM AND TRAGIC REALITIES OF OUR LIVES...

...BUT ONLY FOR AN ALL TOO BRIEF TIME...

...THEN ONE **MUST** RETURN TO THE **REAL WORLD** AND FACE **FATE** HEAD ON. EVEN IF THAT LEADS ONLY TO **DEATH.**

WE HAVE BEEN LED BY A CONFLUENCE OF EVENTS TO THIS FOUL CITY -- AND NOW FIND OURSELVES TRACKING A **POWERFUL VAMPIRE CULT...**

...ONE WITH TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE **DAYTIME** WORLD AS WELL.

RIGHT THIS WAY, LADIES -- AND YOU OUGHT TO FEEL REAL **SPECIAL** TONIGHT...

TEE-HEE! **WHY,** MR. STEINMAN...?

BECAUSE, TRIXIE, IT'S NOT EVERY **WORKING GIRL** --

-- WHO GETS TO MEET A MAN AS **IMPORTANT** AS MY **BOSS.**

WOW...IS YOUR BOSS A **MOVIE PRODUCER?**

HA-HA! WELL, PERHAPS I'M NOT **THAT** IMPORTANT, DIXIE...

...BUT I HAVE HAD **LUNCH** WITH STEVEN SPIELBERG, IF THAT COUNTS.

HEY, WAITAMINUTE -- I **KNOW** YOU FROM THE TEEVEE! YOU'RE A **CONGRESSMAN** OR SUMPTHIN'... MR. VAN FLEET, RIGHT?

HOW **CHARMING.**

I AM A **SENATOR,** SLUT. AND YOU TWO ARE **DINNER.**

OH MY GAW-K-K!

LEAVE *HIM* OUT OF THIS, IF YOU PLEASE, MY DEAR. THE SENATOR DOESN'T LIKE TO DISCUSS *RELIGION* OVER A *MEAL.*

NOW, BE A GOOD *APERITIF,* AND WAIT YOUR *TURN.*

-SLURRRP-

DIE, HELLSPAWN --

BY COMMAND OF THE HOLY ORDER OF THE RED HOOD!

SLEEGH!

TWINNG

-SIGH-

I ENJOY *MELODRAMATIC DIALOGUE* EVEN LESS THAN RELIGION WHILE DINING.

YOUR *ARROWS,* HOWEVER, I *CAN* DEAL WITH...

CHUK

...WHILE MY *BODYGUARDS* MAKE SHORT WORK OF *YOU.*

BLAM BLAM BLAM

THIS MAY GET UGLY. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, STEINMAN.

AAAK-K-K!

SKUSH

YAAA -- URK!

DAMN -- MY QUARRY ESCAPES, AND I AM TOO BADLY *OUTNUMBERED* TO GIVE CHASE.

AND EVEN THE *HELP* ARE *BLOOD-SUCKERS*...

SINCE MY DEATH WILL SERVE THE CAUSE NOT AT ALL -- *ADIEU*, GENTLEMEN. WE *WILL* MEET AGAIN...

BLAM

THUMP

THIS IS AS BIG AS SCARLET HAS SUSPECTED ALL ALONG. THIS POLITICIAN IS A VAMPIRE *LORD* -- PERHAPS THE MOST *POWERFUL* OF HIS KIND ON EARTH...

...AND HE WANTS TO BE *PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!*

...YOU *HEARD* ME. THE SENATOR WANTS THIS RED HOOD GUY TRACKED DOWN AND *ELIMINATED* BEFORE ANOTHER NIGHT-FALL.

DON'T WASTE MY TIME WITH *WHY-NOTS* -- JUST DO IT.

WAR LOG ENTRY -- RESEARCH CONFIRMS THE GREAT POLITICAL AMBITION OF THE VAN FLEET MONSTER -- AND REVEALS A MAJOR SURPRISE. PERFORCE HIS POSITION, HE MUST MOVE ABOUT IN DAYTIME!

SINCE ALL ASSEMBLED LORE SAYS THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR VAMPIRES, THIS ONE MUST BE VERY POWERFUL INDEED TO IGNORE THE NATURAL LAWS...

skweee

THE WINDOW...? AH, YOU ARE SLIPPING, SCARLET. I SHOULD NOT HEAR YOUR APPROACH --

GOD IN HEAVEN... CHILDREN OF JUDAS?!

VAN FLEET'S POWERS SURPASS EVEN MY ESTIMATION IF HE CAN RESURRECT THIS WRETCHED SPECIES!

REARRGH!

THESE POOR THINGS ARE MERE PAWNS -- BUT SYMPATHY WILL NOT OVERRIDE MY SELF-PRESERVATION!

SCREEE!

TWUNG

NOOO! I AM -- UNNGH -- OVERWHELMED!

RARRRHR!

THERE ARE TOO -- UH -- *MANY* OF THESE LITTLE -- OWWW -- *BEASTS* --

THUNK

GRRRL

-- AND THEY ARE ALL AS *TENACIOUS* AS STARVED *RATS!*

AIEEE!

TWANG

AH, COUSIN, YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FAR TOO KIND TO CHILDREN AND SMALL ANIMALS...

...FORTUNATELY FOR *YOU*, I AM NOT SO *SENTIMENTAL.*

CHUK-K

CHUMPH

KRUTTCH

I HAVE ROUTED THEM, COUSIN -- BUT ONLY FOR THE NONCE, I FEAR. MORE OF THEIR *PACK* WILL COME, AND SOON. WE MUST GET --

NO, SCARLET, *I* AM TOO BADLY INJURED. YOU MUST GET AWAY ALONE TO KEEP OUR CAUSE ALI --

SHUT UP. *WE* ARE GOING -- *NOW!*

YOU MUST LISTEN, SCARLET -- I HAVE FOUND *MORE* THAN WE FEARED. WE ARE UP AGAINST A *VAMPIRUS SUPERIUM*...

I WOULD NOT HAVE BELIEVED SUCH A THING EXISTED. STILL, WE MUST GET TO THE *ORDER* AND TELL *THEM* -- AND GET YOUR WOUNDS ATTENDED TO --

RAAHHHH!

IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME -- YOU *GO*...GET THE WORD THROUGH!

I WILL... DETER THEM AS BEST I CAN...

GRROWW

NO! I WILL *NOT* LEAVE YOU--!

THERE IS NO CHOICE -- NO TIME -- *GO!*

DAMN YOU, COUSIN... ALWAYS TOO SENTIMENTAL...

I *GO*, BUT I SWEAR YOU *WILL* BE AVENGED!

TUNNG

I...AM DEAD ANYWAY -- GOOD-BYE...

...I LOVE YOU -- *ERRK!*

NONE OF THEM GAVE CHASE--?

SACRE! THESE LITTLE THINGS HAVE BEEN *PROGRAMMED* TO KILL ONLY ROUGE!

YEAH... PROGRAMMED BY *ME.*

ALL RIGHT, KIDDIES, FEAST *WELL* -- THEN RUN ALONG HOME TILL DADDY CALLS AGAIN.

... #99 WORKS THE PUCK UP ICE -- DODGES THE SAVAGE MORRISETTE, AND -- *WHAP! CHUNG!* -- SLAP SHOT AND *GOAL! YAYY!*

YOU'RE A REALLY GREAT GUY TO BE AROUND, JOE. KNOWING YOU MAKES BEING AN *UNDEAD VAMPIRE* ALMOST TOLERABLE.

REALLY. THANKS.

HEY-*HEY!* DON' GO GETTIN' ALL *MOOSHY* ON ME, BOBO.

WE ROUGH, TOUGH, KILLER *VAMPIRO*, BOY -- WE DON' HAVE *FUN*, AND WE DON' EVER GET *MOOSHY!*

MOOSHY BAD. GOT IT.

GOOD. LET'S GO DO SUMPIN' *STOOPID COOL* AND -- *HEY?!*

WHAT THE HECK'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?

RAAHHHR

HEY--!

SNARRLL

ROO--?

RUH-RUH-RUHH!

WHAT TH' *HELL* WERE *THEY*?! CREEP ME OUT FOR *LIFE*, MAN...

QUOTH THE TOUGH, KILLER VAMPIRO...

THOSE LITTLE... ***WHATEVERS*** TORE THIS POOR GUY TO ***SHREDS*** -- AND LOOK AT THOSE WEIRD WOUNDS...

...*X*-SHAPED PUNCTURE MARKS IN GROUPS OF *THREE* -- AND SCORES OF THEM? WHAT MAKES THIS KIND OF MARK?

DON'T KNOW, DON'T WANNA KNOW -- *BRRR!*

YEAH, IMAGINE HOW THIS GUY FEELS. HEY, WHAT'S THIS...?

WAKE UP ONE NIGHT A VAMPIRE LIKE ME, AND YOU LEARN PRETTY QUICK THAT THE WORLD'S A LOT ***STRANGER*** THAN YOU FIGURED. BUT THOSE LITTLE NASTIES--?

I'M WITCHOO -- NOW LET'S ***VAMOOSE!***

OKAY, LET'S GET BUSY...

...THIS HOODED SCHMUCK KEPT A JOURNAL -- COLLECT *THAT* AND EVERYTHING ELSE.

HE DON'T HAVE MUCH -- HE TRAVELED *LIGHT.*

GUY *LIVED* LIGHT -- HE WAS AN *ESTHETE,* DON'CHA KNOW. A *MONK.*

NOW GRAB IT ALL, AND LET'S *GO.*

WHAT ABOUT THE BODIES OF THE DEAD...UM... CHILDREN?

CLEAN-UP WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM -- AND EVERY OTHER TRACE OF OUR EXISTENCE.

OKAY, ROSCOE, START *SWEEPING UP...*

YOU GOT IT, MR. S...

Floooof!

TELL ME *AGAIN* WHAT THESE CREATURES LOOKED LIKE.

LIKE THE CAST OF *OLIVER* WITH *TEETH* BY WAY OF *JAWS.*

THEY WERE A PACK OF *KILLER DOG BOYS.* WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED?!

NOTHING. I BELIEVE I KNOW WHAT IT WAS YOU SAW...

...THE CHILDREN OF JUDAS. IT CAN BE NO OTHER, THOUGH I HAD THOUGHT THEM *LONG EXTINCT.*

JUDAS? THEY GO THAT FAR BACK?

NOT QUITE. I BELIEVE THE LEGEND IS THAT JUDAS THE BETRAYER WAS MADE TO WALK THE EARTH FOREVER -- SIRING INHUMAN, DEMONIC OFFSPRING AS PART OF HIS CURSE.

AND THEY HAVE *WEIRD FANGS* THAT LEAVE X-SHAPED PUNCTURES -- THREE OF 'EM?

YES. SUPPOSEDLY REPRESENTING THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER -- IT APPEARS THAT THEIR KIND HAVE *RETURNED* TO PLAGUE HUMANKIND.

AND VAMPIRE-KIND...

RETURNED FROM *WHERE* -- WHAT'S THE *REAL* STORY WITH THESE ANIMAL-BOYS?

IT GOES BACK TO MEDIEVAL EUROPE, TO THE TIME OF THE *BLACK DEATH...*

...WITH ALL THE CHAOS AND CONFUSION OF THE TIME, AN UNCOUNTABLE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WERE ORPHANED OR SIMPLY ABANDONED.

SOME WERE EVEN DRIVEN OFF BY SUPERSTITIOUS PARENTS, AS IF THE CHILDREN HAD CAUSED THE PLAGUE. AND HUMANS CALL *US* MONSTERS...

"MANY OF THESE LOST CHILDREN, MOSTLY BOYS, TOOK TO SCRAPING OUT AN EXISTENCE FROM THE SURROUNDING FORESTS, QUICKLY DESCENDING TO BASE, ANIMALISTIC NATURES IN ORDER TO SURVIVE.

"IT IS SAID THAT IN FORGETTING THEIR HUMANITY, THESE YOUNG ONES LOST CLAIM TO THEIR OWN SOULS. AND THIS MADE THEM EASY PREY FOR THE DARK CREATURES THAT ROAMED THAT DEMON-HAUNTED LANDSCAPE.

"WHATEVER THE CAUSE, THESE CHILDREN BECAME DEMONIC BEASTS THEMSELVES. THEY WERE THE FIRST OF THEIR NEW KIND, AND SOON SPREAD THEIR SEED LIKE A CONTAGION AMONG THOUSANDS OF OTHER LOST CHILDREN ACROSS THE DEVASTATED CONTINENT."

THEY WERE A SORT OF... *COUSIN*, I SUPPOSE, OF THE *VAMPIRE* -- BUT WITHOUT THE PREEMINENT *HUMAN INTELLIGENCE*.

IN ANY CASE, I HAD THOUGHT THE CHILDREN LONG DEFUNCT. IF THEY ARE BACK, SOMEONE OF *RARE POWER* IS BEHIND IT.

THAT DOESN'T MATTER. DO *NOT* INVOLVE YOURSELF FURTHER IN THIS MATTER.

NOW *HOLD* ON, EKIMUS -- I'M WILLING TO FOLLOW YOUR WISDOM IN TRAINING TO BE ALL THE VAMPIRE I CAN BE -- AND EVEN WILLING TO *TRUST* YOU THAT I *AM* SOME SORT OF *"CHOSEN ONE"*...

...BUT IF MY *FAMILY* IS IN *TROUBLE*...

THE HUMANS ARE *NOT* YOUR FAMILY ANYMORE, ALEX. IF THEY *ARE* THREATENED, IT IS NOT YOUR CONCERN.

I WILL NOT JUST *SURRENDER* MY HUMANITY -- OR MY *SOUL* -- LIKE THOSE DEMON CHILDREN...AND I WILL *NEVER* ABANDON MY FAMILY!

I DON'T KNOW HOW IT *CONNECTS*, BUT THE DEAD GUY HAD THIS BUTTON -- WITH THE NAME OF THE SENATOR MY *DAD* WORKS FOR...

VAN FLEET

SO.

IS *THIS* WHERE YOU *STORM* OUT AND SLAM THE DOOR? IS THAT NOT *STANDARD PRACTICE* BY NOW?

BWA HA HA HA HA!

FUNNY ONE, EKKIE -- THERE MIGHT BE *HOPE* FOR YOU YET.

I'M *LEAVING* NOW, BUT I'M DEFINITELY *NOT* STORMING. C'MON, JOE, I WANT TO GO LOOK IN ON MY FOLKS.

IF THIS BREAKS ANY *RULES*, EKIMUS, I'M AFRAID YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO *LIVE* WITH IT.

I CANNOT HOLD YOU TO *"RULES"*, ALEX, NOT WHEN YOUR VERY *EXISTENCE* AS THE FIRST OF A NEW *SPECIES* OF VAMPIRE BREAKS ALL THE RULES I UNDERSTAND.

GO.

MAN, YOU SURE SHOWED THAT STONE-FACED CHUCHO. YOU OUGHTTA CHECK INTO THIS *CHOSEN* GIG -- SEE IF THERE'S A *PAYDAY!*

I'LL WAIT ON *THAT.* I'M IN NO HURRY TO MAKE MY LIFE EVEN *WEIRDER.*

HOLD IT, BIG *LIMO* AT TWELVE O'CLOCK!

IT'S *VAN FLEET!*

HEY! *THIS* IS *EFFED UP!*

THE *BIG GUY* -- VAN FLEET? -- HE'S ONE OF *US.* A *VAMPIRE!*

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? I'VE SEEN HIM AROUND IN THE *DAYTIME!*

DUNNO -- BUT I CAN *READ* HIM. HE'S THE REAL DEAL.

WAIT -- THAT ROOF OVER THERE...

...DO YOU SEE SOMEONE *SNEAKING AROUND?!*

WORRY LATER, BOBO -- THE LIMO'S DRIVIN' OFF WITCHER PEOPLE!

MAN, YOUR FOLKS MOVE WIT' A *HOT CROWD* -- GREAT SEATS AT A CENTRAL PARK *ROCK CONCERT!*

I GUESS. WHAT'S YOUR UNDEAD-RADAR READ ON *THIS* GUY? HE'S *GOT* TO BE ONE OF US...

THIS GUY? NAW, HE'S THE GREATEST MINSTREL-POET OF HIS GENERATION, NOT A VAMPIRE.

THANK *YEEEW!* I'D LIKE TA' DO A SONG OFF M'NEW ALBUM -- S'CALLED "COLD FINGERED PROCTOLOGIST FREE-CLINIC BLUES..."

HERE YOU ARE, MRS. ELDER, WITH THE SENATOR'S COMPLIMENTS.

YUM.

IXNAY ON THE *UMYAY*, YOU IDIOT! THE LADY'S *OFF LIMITS* -- MASTER'S *ORDERS!*

SO *SUE* ME FOR BEING *THIRSTY.*

...DON'T *CRY* -- AN' DON'T ASK *WHY* -- BUT IF YOU AIN'T GOT A *GREEN CARD* THEY GONNA LET YOU *DIE*...NOW BEN' OVER BABY AND LET ME *DRIIIIVE*, I GOT COLD FINGERS, BUT MY HEART NEVER *LIIIES*... *EWE*-EEEE ---

THE MAN'S STILL *GOT IT.*

WHOA -- LET'S HOPE IT GETS *BETTER* SOON --

WAIT -- *LOOK!*

IT'S THE SAME *SHADOWY SOMEONE* I SAW ON THE ROOF BEFORE!

SOMEONE'S *STALKING* MY *PARENTS!*

UN... DEUX...

...TROIS!

WHIIIII

PLUK

WHUG--?

SNIPER ATTACK! GET THE SENATOR TO *COVER!*

PROTECT THE ELDERS AS WELL, BRUNO -- THEY ARE MY GUESTS.

SIR! WE HAVE TO GET *YOU* TO *SAFETY* -- THE ELDERS ARE *FINE!*

SEE THAT THEY ARE. *HMMM...* MORE DAMN *HOOD* TROUBLE.

UN... DEUX...

TROI --

TWINNG

NOOOOO!

HELLO, I -- GEVALT!

UNK

MERDE!

LISTEN TO ME, *PUTZ!* THE SENATOR'S AT *RISK* --

-- AND I ALMOST GOT *SKEWERED* HERE! NOW GET SPECIAL SECURITY HERE *NOW!*

OUT OF MY WAY, LITTLE BOY, YOU'RE *RUINING* EVERYTHING *AGAIN!*

I *KNOW* YOU -- YOU SAVED ME FROM *ROSE THE PUPPET* LAST MONTH!

WHISSSH

A MERE *ACCIDENT.* THAT SECOND ARROW WAS MEANT FOR *YOU,* VAMPIRE!

OKAY, YOU TWO -- *FREEZE!*

I DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON HERE, BUT YOU TWO ARE GONNA *BACK OFF* EACH OTHER AND START *TELLIN'* ME.

NOW!

W-WHA--?!

SAINT...?

...SAINT... *GEORGE...?*

H-HOW DO...I...KNOW THAT? AND WHY DOES HE MAKE ME...FEEL... SO...*SICK?*

TAKE IT EASY, SON...

I HAVE NO IDEA -- AND LESS INTEREST. *ADIEU.*

STOP, OR I'LL --

-- SHOOT!

BLANG

NO, DON'T... NOT HER!

OW?

MY GOD! SON...? I DIDN'T MEAN -- LORD, WHAT WAS I THINKING?!

...HURT...? NOT S'POSED TO...?

HANG ON, SON, I'LL CALL FOR PARAMED --

HUH?!

YOU HURT ME! DON'T YOU EVER DO THAT AGAIN!

OFFICER DAVIS -- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

GEORGE--?

REEEEEEEE

DOESN'T MAKE SENSE -- THAT WAS ALEX ELDER, THE MISSING BOY...?

I SHOT HIM, BUT HE YELLED AT ME AND RAN AWAY...?

...THAT SHOULD DO IT, DETECTIVES. WE CAN'T PROVIDE *ONE* CLUE AS TO WHY OUR PEOPLE WERE ATTACKED. IT WAS, WE FEAR, SIMPLY ANOTHER SIGN OF OUR OH-SO-*VIOLENT* TIMES.

NOW THEN, SINCE WE'VE TOLD YOU EVERYTHING WE KNOW, PERHAPS YOU'LL LET US ATTEND TO OUR BADLY SHAKEN GUESTS, YES? THANK YOU, AND GOOD NIGHT.

WHAT'S WITH ALL THE *"WE"* CRAPOLA -- HE GOT A *MOUSE* IN HIS POCKET?

NOT *NOW*, ANDY...

HILDA, SEE TO IT THAT THE DEAR ELDERS HAVE SOME COFFEE, OR ANYTHING ELSE THEY NEED, EH?

MR. STEINMAN, JOIN ME IN MY OFFICE...?

YES, VICTOR, WHAT CAN I DO--?

YOU CAN DO WHAT THE *HELL* I PAY YOU TO DO -- MAKE MY *PROBLEMS* GO AWAY!

IN FACT, JUST TO GET RID OF IT, I'M *GIVING* THIS *HOOD* PROBLEM TO *YOU*, T.C. -- IT'S *YOURS* NOW, *DEAL WITH IT...*

...BEFORE IT *KILLS* YOU.

NOW GET OUT, *WEASEL!*

KRAK

OWWW!

JUST CAN'T GET OVER YOUR *NAZI* PAST, CAN YA VICTOR -- JUST GOTTA SLAP ME AROUND 'CAUSE I'M JEWISH!

DON'T BE ABSURD. I'M NOT A NAZI, AND YOU'RE NOT A JEW -- NOT ANYMORE.

WE'RE *BLOOD BROTHERS* FOREVER, T.C. -- *VAMPIRES!*

YAAAAH!

I SAID YEEOW!

NEVER SEEN *ANYTHING* LIKE THIS.

VAMPIRES USUALLY CAN'T GET SHOT BY BULLETS -- THEY GO *THROUGH* YA LIKE YOU WAS *SMOKE.* *USUALLY.*

THIS COP MUSTA HAD... *MAGIC BULLETS* OR SOMETHIN'...

LISSEN TO ME -- LIKE THERE'S SUCHA THING AS *MAGIC BULLETS!*

HAHAHAHA HA!

OKAY, *OKAY,* BOBO, I'M NOT SORDO -- *DEAF,* YA KNOW!

'SIDES, I GOT IT.

THEN *HOW* DO YOU EXPLAIN IT, JOE...?

AND WHY DID I SEE THE COP IN *KNIGHT'S ARMOR,* JUST FOR A SECOND?!

ARMOR?

...

SAINT GEORGE, ALREADY.

THAT'S THE NAME THAT *POPPED* INTO *MY* HEAD -- WHAT DOES IT *MEAN,* EKIMUS?!

DAMN, I HATE APE-FACE'S MYSTERIOSO CRAP.

YOU AND ME ***BOTH.*** BUT SPEAKING OF MYSTERIOSO, WHAT DO ***YOU*** KNOW ABOUT THE BABE IN THE ***RED HOOD?***

LESS THAN ***ZERO,*** M'MAN...WHY YOU ASKIN' ***ME?*** I DIDN'T EVEN ***SEE*** HER.

SHE GOT YOU ***HOOKED,*** BOBO? YOU GOT A ***THING*** FOR ***RED HEADS?***

YOU DON'T ***KNOW*** HER. YOU DIDN'T ***SEE*** HER.

THEN HOW IS IT YOU KNOW SHE HAS RED HAIR, JOE? ***I*** NEVER MENTIONED ***THAT.***

I...

THAT IS...

OH, ***MAAAAN...***

THIS IS ONE ***VERY*** LONG STORY, ALEX...

"I'VE GOT *ETERNITY*, JOE. START TALKING..."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHILDREN OF JUDAS: BEHIND THE HOOD

VAMPIRE LORE REALITY CHECK #1: THE TURN INTO A **BAT** BUSINESS IS **NONSENSE.** INVENTED BY BRAM STOKER FOR HIS NOVEL "**DRACULA**," APPARENTLY UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT ALL BLOODSUCKING VERMIN MUST, NATURALLY, BE **RELATED.**

FACT IS, YOU WON'T FIND **ANY** VAMPIRE BATS IN TRANSYLVANIA--THEY'RE NATIVE TO MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA. YOU WON'T FIND MANY **VAMPIRES** IN TRANSYLVANIA THESE DAYS EITHER, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER STORY.

SOME **RARE** VAMPIRES **CAN FLY** HOWEVER. WITNESS ALEX ELDER'S NIGHT FLIGHT OVER NEW YORK CITY. THOUGH ONLY A RECENT, AND **UNWILLING** CONVERT TO THE RANKS, ALEX'S POWERS OUTSTRIP MOST OF THE REST OF HIS KIND.

RUMORS PERSIST THAT ALEX IS SOME SORT OF "**CHOSEN ONE**"--THOUGH CHOSEN FOR **WHAT**, BY **WHOM** REMAINS **UNKNOWN.** WORD HAS IT, THOUGH, THAT THIS CREATURE OF THE DARKEST NIGHT MAY INDEED BE AN AGENT OF THE **LIGHT** --THOUGH EVEN **HE** DOESN'T KNOW THAT YET.

HELL, HE'S SO WRAPPED UP IN HIS OWN PROBLEMS, HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HE'S **FLYING...**

WHO **DOESN'T** DREAM OF SOARING FREELY FAR ABOVE THE EARTH? TO FIND YOURSELF ACTUALLY **DOING** IT WOULD BE **EXHILARATING** AND **AMAZING.**

NOT SO ALEX ELDER. HE DRIFTS AIMLESSLY, EYES SHUT TIGHT TO THE WONDER OF HIS SITUATION. HE **THINKS** HE'S **SLEEPING,** NEVER SUSPECTING THAT VAMPIRES DON'T SLEEP ANY MORE THAN THEY TURN INTO **RODENTS.**

BUT ALEX ONLY GRUDGINGLY BELIEVES IN VAMPIRES-- AND STILL DOESN'T BELIEVE IN **FLYING...**

THE CLOISTERS, NEW YORK CITY. 10:38 PM.

I **CAN'T** BELIEVE THIS IS **REALLY** HAPPENING!

BELIEVE IT, PROFESSOR MORIARITY--THAT'S THE **LEGENDARY** UNICORN TISSUE FOR **SURE.**

FOUND ROLLED INSIDE SOME SCROLLS IN A CRUMBLING FRENCH MONASTERY.

THEN IF **IT** IS **REAL,** CAN THE STORY OF ITS **CREATION** ALSO BE TRUE. **WAS** THIS PAINTED IN THE **GARDEN OF EDEN?**

C'MON, IT'S NOT THAT OLD IS IT?

ACTUALLY, LEGEND HAS IT THAT **THIS** WAS PAINTED **IN** THE **GARDEN** IN THE **TWELFTH CENTURY.** THAT THE SOURCE OF CREATION **STILL** EXISTS IN SOME **HIDDEN VALLEY** SOMEWHERE...

WOW.

FAIRY TALES. PFAH--!

IF THERE WAS A PARADISE-- I'D RULE IT!

BOYS, THESE FOOLS AREN'T S'POSED TO BE HERE. HAVE **DINNER.**

YES, MR. STEINMAN, SIR.

UM... SORRY, T.C.-- MISTER STEINMAN. THEY SHOULDA' BEEN GONE BY NOW. BUT YOU KNOW HOW *COLLECTORS* ARE...HEH...

SIR? THE OLD MAN JUST *VANISHED...?*

RAAAAHHRR!

NUHHH--?!

I AM RIGHT *HERE*, BLOODSUCKER--AND *MORE* THAN EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH YOUR *KIND!*

HEAVENS! YOU *ARE...?!*

HE'S *ONLY HUMAN*, RODNEY-- HOW *FAR* COULD HE HAVE GONE? *FIND* HIM!

THEN YOU HAVE SOMETHING *OTHER* THAN THIS LI'L OL' THING--HUH?

UM...

SHPLWKKK-K

WHAT I THOUGHT.

MY NAME IS *STEINMAN*, SCHMUCK! WHY WOULD *THIS* WORK ON *ME?!*

OKAY, BOYS-- LOSE THE MEAT-BAGS SOMEWHERE. ME 'N' PAULY GOT OUR BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO...

WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER HOW LONG, PAULY? THREE YEARS? FOUR?

A LONG, ***PROFITABLE*** RELATIONSHIP, RIGHT? FOR BOTH OF US.

YOUR...***UNDER*** THE ***TABLE*** CURIO DISTRIBUTORSHIP HAS DELIVERED SEVERAL VERY RARE BITS OF ***ARCANA*** THAT MY BOSS CRAVED FOR HIS COLLECTION, AND THAT MAKES YOU A ***FRIEND.***

BUT I ALSO KNOW YOU'VE FOUND A FEW THINGS FOR THE ***RED HOODS*** TOO--SMUGGLED ICONS OUT OF RUSSIA-- AND THAT MAKES YOU A ***TWO-TIMING*** FRIEND.

BUT IT'S JUST ***BUSINESS,*** SO WE'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT PERSONALLY. IN FACT WE'RE GONNA GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO ***PROVE*** WHO YOU LIKE BEST...

...WE WANT THE ORDER OF THE ***RED HOOD WHACKED***--AND YOU CAN HELP BY DRAWING THEM OUT INTO THE OPEN...FOR AN ***AMBUSH.***

H-HOW...?

TELL 'EM YOU FINALLY ***HAVE*** THE THING THEY'VE SEARCHED ***CENTURIES*** FOR...

THE RED MADONNA. THE SENATOR HAS A VERY EXTENSIVE COLLECTION.

WHAT IF THAT WON'T DO IT?

IT ***WILL,*** PAULY, IT WILL. HUMANS FEEL SAFER WHEN THEY POSSESS OBJECTS OF...***SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE...***

SQUUURRP

...NOT THAT IT DOES THEM ONE ***SHRED*** OF GOOD IN THE LONG ***RUN...***

"...IF THERE IS A GOD, HE'S LONG SINCE GIVEN UP HELPING THIS HELLISH MUDBALL."

JOE'S CANTINA

HOTTER THAN HELL, AM I *RIGHT*?

AIN'T IT *MAGNIFICO*?

HUH-HUH-*HUH*? WHADDYA *SAY*, BOBO--THIS THE *GREATEST* FOOD YOU EVER TASTED, OR WHAT?

WE'RE *VAMPIRES*, JOE. WE CAN'T *TASTE* ANYTHING.

YOU *FORGOT* WHAT I TAUGHT YOU? CHANNEL THE *MEMORY* OF ALL THE FOOD YOU EVER ATE AND THE FLAVOR'LL *BURST* IN YOUR MOUTH LIKE-- *HEY*?

YOU EAT IT THEN.

SPLUUP

TSK. WASTIN' PERFECTLY GOOD *TACOS!* WHA'S THE *MATTER* WITCHOO, BOBO?

WHO IS THE WOMAN IN THE *RED HOOD*?

YOU KNOW HER SOMEHOW, JOE--*TELL ME!*

OH... HER.

NOBODY REALLY, JUST SOMEONE I MET *YEARS* AGO IN MEXICO. HIT IT OFF, HAD SOME *LAUGHS*.

DOOMED FROM THE START, THOUGH. SEE, SHE B'LONGS TO A GROUP WIT' SOME PRETTY *DANGEROUS* HOBBIES... LIKE *EXTERMINATING* WEREWOLVES, DEMONS... THE OCCASIONAL *VAMPIRE*.

IT WOON'TA' WORKED OUT.

UH-HUH. SO...

...WHAT'S HER *NAME?*

WHEN I KNEW HER SHE WAS JUST *SCARLET X.* SHE GOT A LAST NAME, I DON'T KNOW IT.

MAYBE IT'S *HOOD*-- LIKE *ROBIN HOOD*--?

TACO TASTIN' BETTER?

WHATEVER. SO, *WHERE* WOULD WE *FIND* THIS SCARLET?

YMCA'D BE IN KEEPIN' WITH HER *BUDGET*--AND HER *MONKISH* LIFESTYLE.

YMCA? HUH--?

YOU *KNOW*--

Y

M

C

A--!

I *KNOW* HOW TO *SPELL* IT, I JUST THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY FOR GUYS.

MAYBE SO, I DUNNO. RULES WOULDN'T KEEP SCARLET OUT ANYWAY...

...

WHAT DO YOU SAY, JOE--LET'S GET OVER TO THE "Y" AND *LOOK* FOR HER--?

MUST'VE BEEN *TOUGH* TO DIE RIGHT SMACK IN THE *MIDDLE* OF *PUBERTY*, HEY?

WHAT--?

NE'ER MIND. C'MON, ROMEO-- LE'S GO CHECK OUT THE "Y."

...YES, MR. STEINMAN, IT'S *ALL SET*. RIGHT, *MIDNIGHT*...

VERY GOOD, PAULY--PROVIDED YOU DIDN'T SCREW UP. YOU MAY END UP BACK ON OUR GOOD SIDE AFTER ALL.

DON'T HANG AROUND, PAULY.

...AND EVERY RED HOOD IN THE *REGION'LL* BE THERE.

LET'S ROLL.

AND YOU, MY LITTLE DEVILS--SOON YOU *FEAST!*

RAAH!

AROOO?

REEET?!

AHRRR?

"...EVERY LAST *ONE* OF 'EM!"

YMCA

IS *THIS* HER ROOM?

CROSSBOW ON THE BED GAVE IT AWAY, HUH, BOBO?

THEN WHERE IS *SHE?*

OKAY, BOYS-- MAKE IT LOOK LIKE AN *ACCIDENT*, BUT *BURN* THESE *HOODED BASTARDS* TO THE *GROUND...!!*

RIGHT BEHIND YOU.

UHHH-- *HI?!*

HI, YOUR... SELF-- HUHH!

AIEEE!

THUNNGH

WHOOP-- HEY!!

WAIT!

LET GO--!

OOO... TOWEL...?

WELL, YOU HAVE THE TOWEL, BUT I'VE THE CROSSBOW.

YOU HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL...

TAISEZ-VOUS-- SHUT UP! OR I'LL KILL YOU ON THE SPOT!

S'OKAY. NOW THAT I'VE SEEN ALL...THIS, I CAN DIE...HAPPY.

WOO.

HEY, RED-- LOOKIN' GOOD!

JOSEPH.

MERDE.

HELLO, JOSEPH. WHY ARE YOU WITH *HIM*? WHY ARE YOU *HERE*?

THE BOY *LIKES* YOU SCARLET. HE TOOK A BULLET FOR YOU, HE WANTS TO KNOW...

WHY YOU'RE *STALKING MY FAMILY*, WITCH?!

I JUST FOUND THIS *FILE*--WHY IS MY *FATHER* A *TARGET*?!

HE *WORKS* FOR A *KING VAMPIRE*--HE MAY BE ONE AS WELL!

SCARLET OBJECTIVE FILE: VANFLEET (NAME)

VAN FLEET

VAN FLEET THE OBJECT

OBJECT?

VANFLEET'S FAMILY

ALEX ELDER ALLOW ME TO PRESENT SCARLET X... SCARLET...

SAY THAT AGAIN AND I'LL *KILL YOU!*

MY DAD'S NOT A VAMPIRE!

THEN IT IS *NOT*; LIKE *SON*, LIKE *FATHER*, EH?

KIDS...?

ENOUGH. I HAVE AN *ASSIGNATION*-- I MUST *DRESS*.

DRESS.

CLOSE YOUR MOUTHS, IMBECILES-- *FANGS* MAKE ME NERVOUS.

NOW, *GET OUT*. BEFORE I REMEMBER THE *OATH* I TOOK TO *KILL* ALL OF SATAN'S MINIONS!

WAIT! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT VAN FLEET-- HOW CAN HE *GO* AROUND IN THE DAYLIGHT? HOW CAN HE BE A VAMPIRE AND A *U.S. SENATOR*?

ALL POLITICIANS *SUCK*, MR. ELDER.

VERY FUNNY! WHAT DOES VAN FLEET HAVE TO DO WITH THE *CHILDREN OF JUDAS*?

I HAVE NO TIME FOR *QUESTIONS*, I HAVE *WORK!* UNLESS YOU'D PREFER I *WARM-UP* WITH YOU TWO...?

NOT NECESSARY. S'LONG, RED-- WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE GUADALAJARA.

NO--WAIT!

NEVER LAY HANDS ON ME AGAIN!

KRAAAAK

TWUNNNNGGGG

SHWIIIH

I CAN'T BE KILLED *THAT* EASILY...

THAT WAS MERELY A *WARNING*, YOU WON'T GET A SECOND.

OWWW!

THWATCH

YOU ALWAYS FIRE YOUR *WARNING SHOTS THROUGH* THE MEXICAN *SIDEKICK?!*

..

LISTEN, STAY *OUT* OF MY *BUSINESS*, COMPRENDRE?

--UNNNN--

IF MY *FAMILY* IS IN DANGER, IT'S *MY* BUSINESS *TOO.*

-SIGH- STAY OUT OF MY *WAY*, THEN. ADIEU.

THIS IS YOUR *'OLD FRIEND'*, JOE? THE ONE WHO JUST *SHOT* AN ARROW *THROUGH* YOU?

YEAH, WELL... SCARLET HAS *ALWAYS* GONE HER OWN WAY.

HOW ELSE TO EXPLAIN THAT SHE BECAME FRIENDS WITH A CHUCHO LIKE *ME*--I *AM* THE *ENEMY*, AFTER ALL.

SO, YOU GON' LET HER GO OFF *ALONE?*

NO, I'LL GO-- JUST TO, UM, COVER HER... *BACK...!*

CHECK YOU LATER.

I GET HIT WIT' THE *ARROW*, BUT *YOU* THE ONE *CUPID'S* WORKIN' ON? TIPICO.

THE NEW YORK CITY WATERFRONT...

...FINALLY RECEIVING THE ***RED MADONNA***, EH? THIS IS INDEED A GREAT DAY FOR THE ORDER OF THE HOOD. THANKS TO YOU, PAULY ORSO.

ARE WE ***ALL*** HERE, THEN?

ALL OF US FROM THE REGION, ERIK-- ***EXCEPT*** SCARLET.

BUT SHE MAY BE CAUGHT UP INVESTIGATING HER PARTNER'S ***MURDER.***

AYE...POOR, VALIANT BROTHER ROUGE.

ALL THE MORE REASON FOR US ALL TO BE EXTRA ***CAUTIOUS*** FROM NOW ON--ESPECIALLY ABOUT BEING ***TOGETHER*** LIKE THIS.

STILL, BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION, PAULY, PERHAPS WE'D BEST WAIT FOR SISTER SCARLET.

S-SURE. LEM'ME, UM, GO GET THE ***RED LADY***--YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT A BEAUTY SHE IS...

...BEAUTY TO DIE FOR.

KREEEEEEEK

WELL DONE, PAULY, WELL DONE. NOW ***BLOW.***

UM, FOLKS? WE GOT A ***FULL HOUSE*** IN HERE...

OKAY, GANG--LET IT ***BLEED...***

THERE CHILDREN, THE BUILDING IS *MARKED*-- IN *BLOOD!*

SPARK

SPLAATT

BREATHE IN THE *SCENT,* KIDDIES--THEN GO INSIDE WHERE YOU CAN FIND LOTS *MORE!*

RRRRRRR

GAROOOOO

DOGS--?

GRRRRRRRRR-EROOOOO!

GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS...

GRRRRRRRR

LET'S NOT *OVER-REACT*-- IT MAY BE *NOTHING...*

SSSSNAAAAARRRLL!!

THE *CHILDREN OF JUDAS*?! BUT THEY ARE MERE *LEGENDS*!!

THOSE *FANGS* AND *CLAWS* ARE *REAL ENOUGH*-- PROTECT YOURSELF!

GET TO THE *WATER* IF YOU CAN--THAT SAME LEGEND SAYS THEY CAN'T *FOLLOW* US THERE!

SKLUSSSH

RAWWWWRRR!

REEEAGGGH!

BACK, YOU LITTLE... MONSTERS!

AAAAAH--K-K-!

THERE ARE TOO MANY--WE ARE OVERWHELMED! WE MUST GET AWAY!!

RAHHH-URRRK-!!

SKUTCH

WE HAVE TO WARN THE ORDER-- OOOF!!

WAHROOOOOO!

S.S.T.

BLAM!!

TIME FOR THE CLEAN-SWEEP, GET YOUR "BROOMS" FIRED-UP!

BURN IT ALL... RED HOODS, BEAST KIDS...

...OLD FISH-- PEE-YOO!

BURN, BABY, BU-U-URN-- OH YEAH!!

BWOOOSH

BURN!!!

SHOOOOSSH

WE GOT A LOTTA DEAD HERE-- COMMENCE *FULL PURGE!*

DAMN, WE'VE A *PYRO-TEAM* ON OUR TAILS NOW! GET *OUT*-- *GET OUT!!*

GRAAAAH?!

MA-A-AN, THESE HOODED BASTIDS' GONNA GET THEIR *GOOSES COOKED*-- *HAW!*

GET IT? I SAID *COOK*--?

I *GOT* IT, SPIVAK-- YOU *HEAR* SOMETHING *ABOVE* US?

OUI--THE *LAST* THING YOU WILL *EVER* HEAR, POMPIER!

TWANGGG

DIE, ASSASSINS!!

WONK

URRRK!

WHOONG

GOT HER!

TUNK

YEAH, ME TOO...

KRAK

SACRE!

OH, YEAH-- BURN, BABY, BURN--

SCARLET--
NO-O-O!!

FOR INSTANCE, ALEX **KNOWS** THAT HE CAN SOMETIMES SUMMON BLAZING **CONFLAGRATIONS** OUT OF **NOWHERE!** BUT **HOW?**

THE LONGER HE SPENDS IN HIS STRANGE NEW WORLD, THE HARDER HE FINDS IT TO **DENY** THE **TOTALITY** OF HIS VAMPIRIC **TRANSFORMATION...**

...AND AT TIMES LIKE **THIS,** HE WISHES HE HAD PAID MORE ATTENTION TO **EKIMUS'** POWER **LESSONS!**

--OH YEAH-- **HEH**--GONNA **TOAST** THE BIT--

NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO **REMEMBER.** NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO FIGHT **FIRE** WITH **FIRE!**

HOW?!

SCARLET...!

--GONNA HAVE A **HOT** TI--?!

NO-NO-NO-**NO** --VERY **BAD,** VERY **BAD!**

OH, SHI-I-I-I--

BOOOOOM

SKRUU-UCH

OH...GOD...FIRE EVERYWHERE...HAVE TO GET AWAY...

NO. NO ESCAPE.

FI-I-I-I-AH BAD!

OUTTA THE WAY, FREAKS--!!

Y-O-O-O-O BAD!

BA-BLOOM!!

OH HELL...

IT WAS THIS ABILITY TO CREATE CONFLAGRATION THAT ALEX USED TO UTTERLY DESTROY THE VAMPIRES WHO TURNED HIM.

NO OTHER OF HIS KIND CAN BRING FIRE--AND THIS IS BUT ONE OF ALEX'S SPECIAL GIFTS.

PERHAPS ALEX ELDER IS THE CHOSEN ONE AFTER ALL...

B-DA-M

BLOOSH

THOOM

AUEEEEEE

...CHOSEN TO BRING REAL HELL TO THOSE WHO SERVE IT.

SCARLET--?!

HOPE SHE AND HERE FRIENDS GOT AWAY...

NO ONE SURVIVES A CLEANSING. CALL THE SWEEPERS BACK BEFORE IT GETS TOO HOT EVEN FOR THEM...

SHUUUUNN
OOOH, SMOKIN'!
--L'K OWWW! FUH! FUH!! AAAAAAAA--*
HOLEE CRAP...! THEY'RE...ALL... TOAST?
LOOKS LIKE MOST OF THE HOODS GOT AWAY, THOUGH. YIPPEE.
MR. STEINMAN, SIR? TELEPHONE FOR YOU...
...IT'S SENATOR VAN FLEET.
I AM SO SCREWED.

CHAPTER
SIX
THE CHILDREN OF JUDAS:
RUNNING MATES

According to tradition, Saint George was a Christian knight who lived in the mid-fourth century. And though he was later to become the patron saint of England, George was probably born in Cappodocia — a long forgotten kingdom in what would today be eastern Turkey. George made his name defeating evil over all of Christendom.

Approaching the ancient Libyan city of Sylene, it is said, the bold young knight chanced upon his true moment in a fetid swamp. For it is there in the marshy wasteland that George encountered the dragon, and the adventure, that would make him an immortal hero.

The dragon had terrorized the city for years, demanding human sacrifice in exchange for continued safety. The unfortunate victims of this ritual were chosen by lots, and bound to their fate by order of the king.

In a case of wonderful irony, the day that George arrived, the chosen sacrifice was to be the king's own daughter. Appalled to find these unfortunate folk so in thrall to such a devilish creature, George determined to set them free to lead godly Christian lives.

It didn't hurt that the princess was very beautiful.

ASKING ONLY THE BAPTISM AND CONVERSION OF THE ENTIRE CITY IN PAYMENT, GEORGE RODE OFF TO FACE THE SCALY HORROR — WHOSE SMOKY BREATH, GEORGE WAS TOLD, WAS SO FOUL IT COULD KILL ANYONE WHO BREATHED IT.

GEORGE WAS NOT AFRAID — HE HAD RIDDEN WITH KNIGHTS WITH **HALITOSIS** THAT COULD TAN LEATHER. TRUTH IS, AS *LEGEND* HAS IT, GEORGE WASN'T AFRAID OF **ANYTHING.**

THE DRAGON WAS **HUGE** — BIGGER THAN THE STALWART KNIGHT HAD COUNTED ON. UPON DISCOVERING THE TRUE MEASURE OF HIS ADVERSARY, GEORGE PRAYED LOUDER, BUT CHARGED ON OTHERWISE UNDETERRED...

...THE CREATURE'S BREATH WAS INDEED DEADLY — AND HOTTER THAN THE HINGES ON THE GATES OF HADES ITSELF.

BUT, WITH HIS EYES FIXED ON **HEAVEN**, GEORGE WOULD FACE EVEN **HELL**-FIRE UNSCATHED.

WITH ONE THRUST OF HIS BROADSWORD, GEORGE ENDED THE DRAGON'S REIGN OF TERROR.

ACCORDING TO TRADITION, GEORGE FREED SYLENE THAT DAY — AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A STRONGHOLD OF CHRISTIANITY.

THOUGH THERE IS NO RECORD, THE INTREPID HERO MUST HAVE GONE ON TO OTHER FABULOUS ADVENTURES...

...AND SOMEWHERE ON THE LANDSCAPE WHERE HISTORY, LEGEND AND **DREAMS** INTERSECT, HIS ADVENTURES CONTINUE STILL...

...THOUGH FROM TIME TO TIME THE LEGEND SPINS-OUT IN SURPRISING WAYS.

SKUSSH

WHAT --?!

YOU HURT ME! DON'T YOU EVER DO THAT AGAIN!

NUH-NUH-NUH --

NO! ALEX -- NO!

GEORGE? THE...DREAM...? AGAIN?

...LARGE NUMBER OF FATAL ATTACKS BY WHAT POLICE SPECULATE ARE PACKS OF WILD DOGS...

HEAR THAT, ANDREW? THE STREETS ARE GETTING MORE DANGEROUS -- YOU COME STRAIGHT HOME AFTER SCHOOL...

...NO MESSING WITH THOSE HOODLUM "FRIENDS" OF YOURS -- HEAR?

AW, MOM, THEY'RE NOT THAT BAD -- 'SIDES, *SAFETY* IN *NUMBERS*, RIGHT?

SEE YA...

GEORGE? DO YOU HEAR YOUR *SON*? HE'S GOING TO HANG OUT WITH HIS *GANGSTERS* NO MATTER WHAT I SAY!

WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS BEFORE, DREW -- *D.B.* AND HIS PACK ARE NOTHING BUT *TROUBLE.*

DO LIKE YOUR MAMA SAYS, SON -- *GOT IT?*

YEAH -- *WHAT*EVER...

BYE.

KLIK

GEORGE DAVIS! DO YOU EVEN *CARE* WHAT HAPPENS TO ANDREW?!

I NEEDED *YOU* TO LAY DOWN THE *LAW* -- NOT JUST ECHO *ME!* HE ALREADY KNOWS HOW TO TUNE *ME* OUT!

I'M SORRY, LIZ -- I KNOW I'VE BEEN KINDA DISTRACTED BY WORK LATELY -- BUT I'M NOT REALLY THAT WORRIED, DREW'S A *GOOD KID*...

NOT FOR LONG IF *YOU* KEEP IGNORING HIM! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THAT BOY, GEORGE?

I... I DON'T KNOW...

A DAY PASSES INTO NIGHT...

WHAT'S TAKING VICTOR SO LONG? *HE* CALLED *ME*...

RELAX, STEINMAN -- I'M READY FOR YOU NOW...

...COME INTO... MY PARLOR -- HEH! HEH!

HA... VERY FUNNY, SENATOR. YOU WANTED TO SEE ME?

C'MON, T.C. LIGHTEN UP -- YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'VE BEEN SUCKING LEMONS INSTEAD OF BLOOD!

HOO -- I'M IN RARE FORM TODAY!

YOU ARE IN A SURPRISINGLY GOOD MOOD, VICTOR -- GIVEN THE, UM... DOWNTURN IN OUR FORTUNES LATELY...

...I MEAN, THERE ARE MANIACS OUT THERE TRYING TO KILL YOU -- AND EXPOSE US AS VAMPIRES!

SHH- SHH --

FORGET ALL THAT, T.C. -- THOSE HOODED FREAKS ARE ALMOST ALL ROUTED DESPITE YOUR SCREW-UP... DEAD ALONG WITH MOST OF THOSE BEAST-CHILDREN OF YOURS.

BUT NONE OF THAT IS YOUR PROBLEM ANYMORE...

WELL... THAT'S... THAT'S VERY MAGNANIMOUS OF YOU, VICTOR --

-- THOUGH I'M NOT TO BLAME FOR ANY OF THI --

UM..?

WHAT --? BUT IT'S NOT MY FAU --!

ENOUGH.

BESIDES, I'M NOT BEING MAGNANIMOUS, STEINMAN, MERELY PRAGMATIC.

NONE OF THIS IS YOUR PROBLEM ANY MORE... BECAUSE YOU'RE FIRED.

--uuuLLT!

IT'S *NEVER* YOUR FAULT, IS IT, T.C.? WELL, YOU AND YOUR *EXCUSES* ARE *FINISHED* AROUND HERE.

Y-YOU C-CAN'T *ABANDON* ME -- YOU *M-MADE* ME!

I CAN DO WHATEVER I *WISH.*

GOOD-BYE... *SON.* GET OUT.

THUMP

SCHMUCK.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL!

NOW WHAT?

To Victor Von First
From L

"A Man cannot be too careful in the choice of enemies"

—Oscar Wilde

CAREFUL? PFFFF --!

I DIDN'T GET THIS POWERFUL BEING CAUTIOUS -- OR WORRYING ABOUT *ENEMIES.*

WELL, DINNER TIME...

WILLIAM ELDER EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

SONUVABITCH *FIRED ME...?* C-CAN'T BE...

EXECUTIVE ASSIS IT

SO...THIS *MORTAL* MOVES UP THE *FOOD CHAIN*, BUT *I'M* OUT?

THIS *SUCKS!*

EVENING, BILLY-BOY -- GUESS YOU HEARD WHAT OUR *FEARLESS* LEADER --

-- OOPS, DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD COMPANY -- MY *BAD*...

T.C. STEINMAN, THIS IS OFFICER GEORGE DAVIS, OF THE CITY'S MOUNTED POLICE...

...HE'S BEEN HELPING US TO LOCATE MY MISSING SON, ALEX.

TRYING TO, ANYWAY -- I HAVEN'T ACTUALLY MANAGED MUCH REAL PROGRESS...

UH-*HUH*... SO, YOU THINK THE KID'S *ALIVE?*

I *THINK* SO, YES. I... I THINK I MIGHT'VE *SEEN* HIM LAST WEEK --

-- WELL, I'LL BE IN TOUCH. NICE TO HAVE MET YOU, MR. STEINMAN. BYE.

I *WISH* I COULD *BELIEVE* THAT HE *DID* SEE ALEX...

...BUT FROM HIS *ABSURD* STORY, IT *COULDN'T* HAVE BEEN ALEX.

I CAN'T EVEN BELIEVE THAT HE SAW ANYTHING *REAL* -- ALEX DRESSED IN *BLACK LEATHER*, HANGING WITH A *RED-HOODED* FEMALE *ASSASSIN*?!

RIDICULOUS!

BLACK LEATHER? RED HOOD?

AND, UM, THIS IS ALEX, BILL?

IT IS... WHY DO YOU ASK?

NO REASON, JUST MAKING... CONNECTIONS.

GOTTA GO...

...?

WHAT WAS IT THAT HAD YOU SO ANGRY BEFORE, T.C?

OH, THAT. IT'S SUDDENLY NOT A PROBLEM, BILL -- THANKS FOR YOUR HELP...

VICTOR, YOUR TROUBLES ARE OVER -- VICTOR?!

DAMN -- HE'S ALREADY GONE?

OKAY, I'LL REACH HIM ON THE LIMO'S PHONE...

...C'MON, VICTOR, PICK UP, PICK UP, PICK --

-- VICTOR, IT'S T.C. -- WAIT, DON'T HANG UP! I-I HAVE NEWS!

THE NIGHT OF THE HIT ATTEMPT IN CENTRAL PARK, ONE OF THE RED HOODS WAS SEEN IN THE COMPANY OF A YOUNG GUY IN BLACK LEATHER -- REMEMBER?

WELL, THOSE SAME TWO WERE AT THE WAREHOUSE LAST NIGHT. AND, VICTOR, I JUST FOUND OUT WHO THAT YOUNG GUY IS --

NOT INTERESTED, STEINMAN, TOO LITTLE, WAY TOO LATE -- YOU'RE FIRED, REMEMBER? LOSE THIS NUMBER...

KLAK

HUNG UP... ON ME?!

SKRUNCH

GAAAAH!

I WAS TRYING TO BE LOYAL, VICTOR, NO MATTER HOW BADLY YOU'VE TREATED ME... I WAS TRYING TO SAVE YOUR LIFE -- WELL SCREW THAT!

BUT I WILL DEAL WITH THIS TO AVENGE MYSELF!

ELDER, YOU AND ME ARE GOING TO HAVE A CHAT ABOUT YOUR BLOOD-SUCKING LITTLE BOY!

SO THIS IS HOW YOU FEED, BOBO --? FROM A PLASMA BOTTLE?!

WHAT -- YOU TOO GOOD TO POP A VEIN LIKE THE REST OF US?!

--SSSLURRP--

PLASMA

I'M NOT FEEDING ON PEOPLE, JOE. PERIOD. AND ANIMAL BLOOD JUST DOESN'T SATISFY.

SO, EKIMUS ARRANGED FOR ME TO HAVE THESE INSTEAD. EXCEPT FOR THE WEIRD AFTER-TASTE FROM THE ANTI-COAGULANT, IT WORKS JUST FINE.

TUNKK

NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'M HERE TO KEEP AN EYE ON MY DAD...? LET HIM KNOW HE'S IN DANGER SOMEHOW...

SO, YOU GON' GET UP THERE WIT' A GIANT CATAPULT -- LIKE WYLIE COYOTE?

FORGOT TO CALL ACME. I FIGURE TO GO IN THROUGH THE SERVICE ENTRANCE.

OOPS, AFTER SIX -- THEY CLOSED.

NOT TO --

POTEMKIN-POPP TOWER
SERVICE ENTRANCE
Open 8:00am to 6:00pm

SHANNK

-- ME. THIS VAMPIRE STUFF COMES IN HANDY SOME-TIMES...

THAT VILLAGE PEOPLE GET-UP MIGHT ATTRACT TOO MUCH ATTENTION --

-- YOU WAIT *HERE* WHILE I MAKE SURE DAD'S OKAY.

OKAY. YOU GOT ANY MORE OF THEM *BOTTLES*? WAITIN' CAN BE *THIRSTY* WORK...

ELDER! WE HAVE TO *TALK!*

WHA --? DO YOU *EVER* KNOCK, T.C.?

I *DO* WHATEVER I WANT, MEAT! INCLUDING KEEPING *YOU* FROM STEALING MY *JOB!*

I ALREADY HAVE MORE *POWER* THAN YOU'LL EVER DREAM OF, AND I AIM TO *TAKE* EVEN *MORE!*

I CAN TAKE YOUR *JOB* -- *HELL*, I CAN EVEN TAKE *VICTOR'S!*

MAYBE I'LL TAKE YOUR *WIFE* -- HOW 'BOUT *THAT*, BILL?

YUM.

YOU *FILTHY* --!

TOWNK

UURRK!

NICE *BACKHAND*, BILL. GUESS YOU *EARNED* THAT *TENNIS TROPHY* THE OLD FASHIONED WAY.

NOT *NEARLY ENOUGH* TO STOP ME, BUT *NICE...*

KAGAH!

UNN--?!

VRR

UMP

MR. ELDER, WILL THERE BE ANYTH -- *MR. STEINMAN!* WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?!*

AH, MELINDA. YOU'RE LOOKING LOVELY THIS EVENING...

...I LIKE A GOOD-LOOKING *CORPSE*, SAY GOOD-BYE, MELINDA!

UH-UH-UH --

MY... GOD!

HELLO? I NEED *POLICE* AT POTEMKIN TOWER, *FAST* -- WE HAVE A *SHOOTING* ON THE 34TH FLOOR!

BLAANG

YOU! STAND AWAY FROM THE VICTIMS! THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY!

AH... SHUT UP.

REEEEEEE

SKREEEEECH

BLAANG

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSHHH

HEADS UP, MEN -- THE COPS ARE COMING --

LET 'EM, WE GOT PLENNY *HOSTAGES.*

-- DON'T NEED HOSTAGES, HUGO -- I'M TOO, TOO POWERFUL TO BE CONCERNED WITH ANY *HUMAN* AUTHORITY!

S.W.A.T.

S.W.A.T.

-- *ARMED MEN* HAVE TAKEN SENATOR VAN FLEET'S OFFICE ON THE THIRTY-FOURTH FLOOR!

SWAT

THEY'VE TAKEN AT LEAST *SIX* PEOPLE HOSTAGE!

S.W.A.T.

ONE OF THESE *MANIACS KILLED* MS. JACKMAN, AND BEAT THE *HELL* OUT OF MR. ELDER -- THE SENATOR'S ASSISTANT!

GET *UP* THERE -- BEFORE HE KILLS MR. ELDER -- OR ANYBODY ELSE!

SERVICE

DAD...?!

WE'RE *ON* IT -- TO THE *ELEVATORS,* MEN!

SWAT

HUP!

HUP!

HUP!

HUP!

HUP!

S.W.A.T.

DING

BE *READY*, BOYS, BUT DON'T CHARGE IN *GUNS* BLAZING -- THEY'VE GOT *HOSTAGES*...

ACTUALLY, CAP'N, ALL THE *HOSTAGES* ARE... WELL, *DEAD.*

OOPS.

SHUMP

S.W.A.T.

FREEZE, PSYCHO -- AND DROP THE WOMAN -- *NOW!*

GEE, CHIEF, YOU'VE GOT ME *DEAD* TO *RIGHTS*...

...BUT I HAVE YOU JUST PLAIN *DEAD!*

RAAAHR!

HEY -- UUURRK!

LOOT --?

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM

G-U-U-C-K?

GET THAT *MOTHER OFF* THE LIEUTENANT!

NOPE. DIDN'T HURT.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

COPS FOR DINNER, EVERYBODY -- LET'S CHOW DOWN!

NOOO--

YAAAAH!

I DON'T NEED NO STEENKIN' CATAPULT -- LEVITATING UP AN EMPTY ELEVATOR SHAFT IS THE ONLY WAY TO TRAVEL.

SKUNK

RRRRRRRRRRRR

WHOA --?!

'COURSE IT SUCKS IF THE SHAFT IS NOT EMPTY...!

RRRRRRRRRR

OH... HELL! HOW DO I PUT IT IN REVERSE?!

RRRRRRRRRR

KREEEK

?!

GET IN HERE, IDIOT!

OOOF -- SCARLET?!

HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS IN TROUBLE?!

I DIDN'T! I WAS GOING TO USE THE SHAFT MYSELF -- WHEN I SAW YOU ABOUT TO GET SQUOOSHED!

WHY I SAVED YOU IS A MYSTERY EVEN TO ME.

I HAVE BEEN WATCHING YOU -- AND FOLLOWING YOU -- EXPECTING TO BE LED TO THE DEN OF THE KING VAMPIRE, AND I HAVE NOT BEEN DISAPPOINTED!

NOW, I WILL KILL THAT MONSTER -- AND YOU WILL HELP!

I WILL? I MEAN, I WILL! HOW?

GO UP THE EXTERIOR OF THE BUILDING -- DISTRACT THE MAD BEASTS WHILE I ATTACK FROM BEHIND.

UP. FROM OUTSIDE.

SKLEESH

NO. UH-UN. NOT ME -- I HAD TROUBLE WITH THIS FLYING BIT IN THE ELEVATOR SHAFT! I DON'T THINK I'M READY...!

THEN DON'T THINK, FOOL! YOUR FATHER IS IN DANGER -- JUST GO!

DO NOT ENGAGE ANY OF THEM -- YOU ARE DEFINITELY NOT READY FOR THAT -- JUST MAKE ENOUGH NOISE TO ATTRACT ATTENTION!

WHOOOA!

OH... GOD! LOOK AT ME -- I'M GARY OLDMAN!

BUT... IT'S WORKING! HOW MUCH MORE IS THERE TO MY POWERS? WHAT CAN'T I DO?

...CAN'T JUST SIT HERE WAITING. GETTING BORED. GETTING HUNGRY.

WISH I HAD ONE'A BOBO'S BLOOD BOTTLES ABOUT NOW...

YO, POCAHONTAS --? GO PEDDLE YOUR SERVICES SOMEWHERE ELSE, PRINCESS!

DON'T NEED IT BOTTLED IF YOU GET IT DELIVERED FRESH, THOUGH...

COPS ARE USUALLY OFF LIMITS, BUT I'M AWFULLY HUNGRY...

"...AND THIS SUCIO IS SO-O-O-O ASKING FOR IT...!"

HE WHAT?! FOURTEEN DEAD? INCLUDING POLICE?! IS STEINMAN INSANE --?

YES, LEON, THAT *WAS* A *RHETORICAL QUESTION.*

I'M ON MY *WAY* -- *I'LL* STOP THAT IMPUDENT CLOWN *MYSELF* -- ONCE AND FOR ALL!

SKREEEE

NO ONE CAN STOP ME! VAN FLEET IS *FINISHED* -- T.C. STEINMAN IS THE *NEW KING!*

GOOD LORD -- IS DAD EVEN *ALIVE* IN ALL THAT *GORE?!*

HELLOO, BILL, I'VE SAVED *YOU* FOR *LAST* -- LAST BEFORE VICTOR, ANYHOO!

HONORED? READY TO *DIE?*

SKRRAASH!

LEAVE HIM *ALONE, YOU MONSTER!*

WHO YOU CALLING *MONSTER,* YOU LITTLE --?

-- MOOOOK?!

THOOM

DAMNED... PUNK!

IDIOT! I SAID NO FIGHTING!

MERDE. IT APPEARS THAT I MUST SAVE THIS TODDLER FROM HIMSELF AGAIN.

I CAN EASILY TAKE OUT THE LUNATIC STEINMAN FROM HERE...

NO!

KLUDD

-- UNNNN --!

TUNK

SACRÉMENT -- MY CROSSBOW!

YOU WILL NOT HARM MR. STEINMAN, WITCH! I'LL SMASH YOU TO PULP FIRST!

RAVE ON, LACKEY -- BUT I AM NOT WITHOUT DEFENSE!

AS YOU WILL SEE!

ADIEU, FOOL!

-- EEECH --?!

THUNCH

KRASSH

NOW TO SEE WHAT *TROUBLE* THE *CHILD* HAS FOUND...

WHOOA!

KRASHH

YOU'RE ELDER'S *BRAT* -- DID *HE* PUT YOU UP TO THIS?

IS *THIS* HOW HE PLANNED TO *TAKE OVER* FROM VAN FLEET -- FROM *ME*?!

YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO *KILL* ME -- YOU CAN'T EVEN *HURT* ME --

ARGH!

S-SO DAMNED *FAST* --?!

SLASH

HOW DID YOU DO THAT, PUNK?! YOUR NOTHING -- I'M THE KING --!

KING CRAP, MAYBE -- BUT YOU'RE THE ONE'S GOING TO WIND UP NOTHING -- NOTHING BUT DEAD!

TRYING TO BRING FIRE -- LIKE I DID TO TOAST ROSE THE PUPPET -- BUT IT'S NO GOOD -- I CAN'T RAISE A SPARK!

MAN... WITHOUT IT, I'M DOG FOOD...

WHY'RE YOU JUST STANDING THERE, SCHMUCK? AFRAID OF ME?

TOO LATE SMART, SONNY -- YOU CAN'T STOP ME, AND NO ONE ELSE WILL EVEN TRY!

NOW, GEDOUDDA HERE!

WHAM

??

WHERE'D THE *LIGHTS* GO?

WHERE'D YOU GET TO, *KID*? HOW'D YOU *RIG* THIS?

THE BOY IS THE VERY ***LEAST*** OF YOUR TROUBLES, T.C.

V-VICTOR --?

YES... MY ***SON.*** I'M HERE TO ***FINISH*** THIS ***TANTRUM*** OF YOURS.

HERE, ONCE AGAIN TO CLEAN UP ONE OF YOUR ***MESSES.***

SHUT UP -- YOU'RE NOT KEEPING ME ***DOWN*** ANYMORE, VICTOR!

I MAY BE THE ***SON,*** BUT I'VE SURPASSED ***YOU,*** DADDY DEAREST!

AND ***NOW,*** ***YOU'RE*** GONNA BE A ***PART*** OF THIS ***MESS!***

YOU'RE GOING DOWN, VICTOR!

-SIGH-

T.C., YOU ARE ***SUCH*** A ***DISAPPOINTMENT...***

...TIME TO *CUT* MY LOSSES.

SHLIIKK

OH.

THUMPH

POOR, T.C.

YOU NEVER COULD SEE THE *BIG PICTURE.* I BLAME MYSELF.

ICK -- WHAT *HAPPENED?*

TUMP SSUSSH TUMP SUSSH TA DUMP

YOU *OWE* ME, YOUNG ONE...

WUP WUP WUP WUP WUP WUP

-- YOU IN THE *BUILDING* -- THIS IS THE *NATIONAL GUARD!* DROP YOUR WEAPONS AND *SURRENDER!*

I DON'T UNDERSTAND... *WHO* WAS THAT? WHO DO I OWE?!

YOU ARE IN VAN FLEET'S *DEBT,* CHILD -- AND BE SURE THAT THE MONSTER *WILL* COLLECT.

NOW, THE AUTHORITIES CLOSE IN -- LET US DEPART.

LURRG, WHY CAN'T WE TAKE THE *ELEVATOR...?*

OH, YES...THAT WORKED *SO* WELL FOR YOU BEFORE, DID IT NOT?

W-WHAT-EVERRRR...

FINE. PASS OUT. LUGGING *DEAD WEIGHT* IS NO BURDEN FOR ME...

JOSEPH -- HE IS COMPLETELY DONE IN -- WE NEED *TRANSPORTATION!*

NO PROBS, MAMA -- GOT JUST THE TICKET *RIGHT* HERE...

EXCELLENT, JOSEPH -- WHERE DID YOU COME BY THIS FABULOUS MACHINE?

GUY I HAD *DINNER* WITH LET ME USE IT.

HEH.

VRRRL

VWM

...COULDN'T BE MORE SHOCKED AND SADDENED BY THIS TERRIBLE TRAGEDY.

APPARENTLY, MY CHIEF AIDE, THOMAS C. STEINMAN, WAS IN LEAGUE WITH SOME UNKNOWN TERRORIST GROUP HELL-BENT ON BRINGING DOWN DEMOCRACY ITSELF!

VRRMMMM

HOW DO YOU FEEL, SENATOR?

I FEEL BETRAYED, OF COURSE -- AND RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES TONIGHT AT STEINMAN'S CRAZED HANDS...

...IF ONLY I'D SEEN WHAT THOMAS WAS CAPABLE OF...

...THIS IS JUST ...DEVASTATING!

IF ANYTHING GOOD CAN COME FROM THIS HORRIFIC NIGHT, IT IS THAT WE RECOGNIZE THE HEROISM OF BILL ELDER, MY EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT.

HE ALONE SURVIVED, AFTER FIGHTING VALIANTLY FOR THE LIVES OF HIS FELLOWS.

I WILL SEE TO IT THAT BILL HAS THE FINEST CARE AVAILABLE IN HIS RECOVERY -- AND WHEN HE'S WELL ENOUGH TO COME BACK TO WORK...

...HE'LL REPLACE THE UNFORTUNATE MR. STEINMAN AS MY RIGHT HAND MAN. GOD BLESS HIM AND ALL THESE POOR VICTIMS -- GOOD NIGHT.

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"YOU OWE ME, YOUNG ONE..."

THE END

CHAPTER SEVEN

HARK

IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS.

EVERYWHERE YOU GO.

ALEX ELDER WON'T BE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS THIS YEAR --

-- OR EVER AGAIN.

HOME AND EVERYTHING HE KNEW AND BELIEVED IN IS GONE FOREVER -- DEAD ALONG WITH HIS FORMER HUMANITY.

OF COURSE, AS ALEX OUGHT TO KNOW, VAMPIRES AREN'T SUPPOSED TO CRY.

BESIDES, CHRISTMAS EVE IS A TIME OF JOY AND LAUGHTER...

...A TIME OF HOPE.

WH-WHERE'D *YOU* COME FROM, YOUNG LADY? SHOULDN'T YOU BE *INSIDE* AND ASLEEP ON A NIGHT LIKE *THIS*?

AND WHERE ON EARTH DID YOU GET *WHITE ROSES* IN DECEMBER?

TELL YOU WHAT, I'LL TAKE THE WHOLE BUNCH, SO YOU CAN GET HOME TO WAIT FOR SANTA.

GO GET WARM AND DREAM OF SUGARPLUMS, OKAY?

EVERYBODY DESERVES *SOME* SORT OF CHRISTMAS, RIGHT...?

DINER

JINGLE

FOOD

EVENING. I'D LIKE A *BURGER*, PLEASE -- AND A LARGE *CHOCOLATE* SHAKE.

ACH -- WHAT KIND OF MEAL IS THAT FOR A GROWING *BOY?* DON'T YOU HAVE A *MOTHER* TO FEED YOU *BETTER?* TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE IN *BED* AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?

N-NOT... REALLY, NO.

NOT *ANY-MORE.*

ON YOUR OWN SO YOUNG? THAT'S TERRIBLE... CHILDREN *NEED* THEIR *MOTHERS.*

WELL, YOU BE *CAREFUL*, CHILD -- ESPECIALLY OF *GIRLS* LIKE *THAT...*

IN ZAGREB, WHEN I WAS A GIRL, WE WOULD SAY SHE IS *VUKODLAK...*

... A *VAMPIRE!*

SHE... *IS?*

NO -- THERE ARE NO *REAL* VAMPIRES, SILLY BOY. BUT THIS ONE IS LIKE MY DAUGHTER, GRETA *WAS* --

-- TRAVELING WITH BAD PEOPLE WHO *SUCK* THE *LIFE* OUT OF HER ALL THE SAME.

24

AND... POOR GRETA DID NOT SURVIVE.

BURGER DELUXE AND A CHOCOLATE SHAKE, JIMMY.

...WE BE JOMMIN' ...JOMMIN'

INGOT

NO MENUS. JUST COFFEE.

PLEASE.

UPTOWNERS -- HMMPFF.

MAGDA

...DID NOT SHOOT THE DEPUTY...

BURGER. SHAKE. MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THIS ISN'T A *PICK-UP* BAR, HUSSY -- FIND YOUR "*DATES*" SOMEWHERE ELSE.

WH-WHAT? I'M NOT...

JINGLE

WHAT? -- ARE YOU *ATTRACTING* THEM?

YOU DON'T EVEN *KNOW* ME. WHY ARE YOU SO *MEAN?*

MA-A-AN! IT'S COLDER THAN A *WITCH'S BUTT* OUT THERE!

HEY THERE, MAGDA!

WHACK

WHAT'YA KNOW? TURNS OUT THE *BUTT* IS COLDER -- *HA!*

HAD TO CHECK...

MA'AM -- THOSE *MEN* --

-- ARE JUST *FOOLS*, AND NOT *YOUR* PROBLEM. THANK YOU ANYWAY, BUT SIT AND FINISH YOUR BURGER.

YOU *KNOW* THESE CREEPS?

NEVER SAW *THESE* TWO BEFORE, BUT I *KNOW* THEM ALL RIGHT.

E F G H
5 6 7 8 9

HEY?! C'N WE GET SOME *COFFEE* OVER *HERE?!*

HEY, URY -- I PLAYED YOUR *FAVORITE SONG!*

MARDA

IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YOU, GENTLEMEN?

HOO-HEEE!

HA HA HA HA

AU CONTRAIRE, MAGDA --

ANY... THING... ELSE --? HAHA

MAGDA

-- IT'S *US* WHO'RE GONNA DO SOMETHING FOR *YOU*...

...YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT YOU HAVE FRIENDS -- *SSNNKR* -- IN *HIGH* PLACES!

OH... YEAH...

YUM, YOU TASTE GOOD, MAGDA -- ALMOST AS GOOD AS YOUR *DAUGHTER*.

LITTLE MORE *CHOLESTEROL*, MAYBE BUT JUST AS *TASTY*.

M -- MY *DAUGHTER?!* MY GRETA... IS *DEAD* -- I'M *TELLING* YOU, MISTER..!

DON'T TELL *ME* ANYTHING, MAGDA KOLAK -- I *KNOW* ALL ABOUT YOUR *DAUGHTER!*

I KNOW SHE WAS *SELLING* IT ON THE STREET, AND I KNOW YOU *SHUT* HER OUT OF YOUR LIFE BECAUSE OF IT.

AND I *KNOW* THAT *YOU* LET HER *DIE* ON YOUR OWN *DOORSTEP!*

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT -- I *DIDN'T* KNOW SHE WAS THERE! HOW COULD I -- SHE'D BEEN GONE FOR *MONTHS?!*

BUT WHEN HER PIMP *STABBED* HER, SHE *CRAWLED* BACK TO YOU FOR COMFORT!

MAYBE IF YOU HADN'T BEEN SO *BLASTED* ON JOHNNY RED THAT NIGHT, YOU'D HAVE HEARD HER CRYING OUT FOR YOUR *FORGIVENESS* AND HELP...

IF YOU DO NOT FORGIVE, YOU WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN!

HER *WHORE'S BLOOD* DRAINED OUT INTO THE *GUTTER*, AND YOU WOULDN'T HELP HER!

YOUR *OWN CHILD* DIED *ALONE* BECAUSE *YOU* REJECTED HER!

NO-O-O... PLEASE... I-I... LOVED MY BABY... I NEVER... PLEASE...

TOO LATE.

HOW 'BOUT *THAT?* STILL GOT THE *TOUCH!*

WH- WHAT --?!

'DIS AIN'T YO' PROBLEM, YOUNG'UN. STAY PUT.

WHA' JOO DO TO MAGDA?

CHUK CHOK

ANSWER ME -- 'FORE I BLOW YOUR *SMILIN'* FACES INTO *NEW YEARS!*

?!?!

SLOW DOWN, ZIGGY -- YOU AREN'T GONNA SHOOT ANYONE... *TONIGHT...*

...WHEN YOU *KILLED* YOUR *DRUG-DEALER* AND THAT *COP* IN KINGSTON, YOU *BAGGED* YOUR *LIMIT!*

TH-THEY WAS GONNA DO *ME...!* I DIN'T WANNA... I... *NO!*

WH-WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU...? I... I...?!

KLUMMPP

YOU MONSTERS!

LOOK WHO'S TALKING...

SIT DOWN BOY -- WAIT FOR YOUR TURN.

WHAK

KLUNK

RELAX, JENNY... I'M NOT GOING TO CAUSE YOU ANY PAIN...

H-HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME...?

I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU, JENNY. I KNOW ABOUT YOUR SUFFERING.

JNGL

GABRIELLE! YOU MADE IT -- GREAT! WE CAN START AS SOON AS RAGS AND REMMY GET HERE!

GREAT NEW LOOK, BY THE WAY...

THANK YOU, ZARIEL, YOU'VE ALREADY BEGUN, FROM THE LOOK OF THINGS.

WHAT? THEM?

NAH -- THEY WERE JUST WARM-UPS! WE'RE SAVING THE MAIN EVENT TILL EVERY-ONE GETS HERE.

AH, YES... QUITE THE STICKLER FOR ORDER, AREN'T YOU?

AND THESE POOR PEOPLE HAD TO DIE?

WELL, SURE -- THEY'RE SINNERS. HAVE TO MAKE 'EM PAY FOR THEIR SINS, RIGHT?

I MEAN, THAT'S OUR JOB... ISN'T IT?

I DON'T EVEN KNOW ANY MORE, ZARI... IS IT?

YOU'RE QUITE SICK, AREN'T YOU, JENNY? AIDS?

I... YES.

I... I'VE KNOWN FOR THREE MONTHS... SINCE TONY -- MY *BOYFRIEND* -- *DIED.*

WE'D BEEN INTO SOME PRETTY *WILD* STUFF, I GUESS... AND NOW WE HAVE TO PAY THE *PRICE.*

BUT... TONY DIDN'T GO *EASY* -- HE WAS IN A WHOLE *WORLD* OF *PAIN* AT THE *END* -- I'M SO SCARED OF GOING THE SAME WAY...

SSSHH... DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT. IT'LL BE *PEACEFUL,* I PROMISE...

PEACEFUL?! YOU'VE TURNED INTO SUCH AN *OLD WOMAN,* RAPHAEL!

AARGH!

DAMN YOU, ZARIEL -- I WAS TRYING TO *HELP* HER!

WE DON'T HELP THEM, SCHMUCK, WE *JUDGE* THEM!

THIS ONE WAS A *PERVERTED FREAK* -- SHE DIDN'T *DESERVE* TO GO ANY WAY BUT *HARD!*

AND *THAT'S* UP TO A SICK, *SADISTIC* PIECE OF CRAP LIKE YOU, EH?

SHUMPH!

STOP! THE *PRELIMINARIES* ARE *OVER,* IT'S TIME TO GET DOWN TO *REAL* BUSINESS.

MICHAEL?

CORRECT. IT IS TIME FOR A *RECKONING.*

GET THE VAMPIRE.

C'MON, KEED --

WH- WHA...?

-- TIME TO START SAYIN' YOUR PRAYERS...

...WHAT'S KEEPING REMIEL AND RAGUEL?

THEY'LL BE HERE.

SORRY, WE'RE LATE.

ANGEL

WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED.

HEY RAGS, WHAT DO YOU HEAR FROM THE *BOSS* LATELY?

...

S'ODD, BUT I'VE BEEN SO BUSY I HAVEN'T *SEEN* THE BOSS IN A *LONG* TIME. HAVE *ANY* OF YOU BEEN IN *TOUCH*...?

ENOUGH. LET'S FOCUS ON THE *BOY*, SHALL WE?

IT SEEMS *WEIRD*, BUT... NO.

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE ALL BEEN TOO BUSY WITH OUR CAREERS, EH?

READ THE CHARGE, REMIEL. AFTER WE PASS FORMAL JUDGMENT, YOU'LL SOUND THE HORN.

OH... YEAH...

WHAT'S WITH ALL THIS FORMAL CRAPOLA?! THE KID'S BLOODSUCKING SCUM, AM I RIGHT? LET'S JUST SKIP TO THE CHASE AND FRY HIM NOW!

THEN WE CAN ALL GET TO THE OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY BEFORE THE CHERUBIM POLISH OFF THE GOOD CHAMPAGNE!

THIS IS GOING TO BE BY THE BOOK, ZARIEL. BE QUIET.

REMIEL -- READ.

SATANIC?!

THAT'S RIDICULOUS, I'M JUST A TEEN-AGER --!

-- WHO NEVER ASKED TO BE A VAMPIRE!

HELL, I'VE NEVER EVEN FED ON A HUMAN BEING!

ALEX ELDER IS CHARGED WITH VAMPIRISM AND SATANIC ACTIVITIES.

MICHAEL, THIS TRIBUNAL IS ABSURD. THE BOY'S NO DEMONIAC -- HE DOESN'T EVEN DESERVE ANYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM!

AND WHAT ABOUT THIS "CHOSEN ONE" BUSINESS?

A RUMOR.

NO ONE'S TOLD ME ANYTHING -- AND I WOULD HAVE HEARD, BELIEVE ME...

...THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF MESSIANIC PRETENDERS, RAPHAEL. NO ONE WILL MISS ANOTHER ONE.

CAN WE GET ON WITH THIS...?

WHO ARE YOU, GUYS?!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE -- AND WHY?!

HE *DESERVES* THAT MUCH, MICHAEL.

WE ARE WHAT SOME CALL THE *HEAVENLY HOST.*

ANGELS, IF YOU MUST.

AND *CHOSEN* OR NOT, *YOU* ARE A BEING OF *VAST POTENTIAL* AND ALREADY *GREAT POWER...*

...YOU MIGHT GO *EITHER WAY* -- BUT *ODDS* ARE AGAINST *GOOD.*

NOT WORTH THE *RISK.*

AND I DON'T WANT TO WAIT FOR *ORDERS,* EITHER. WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON OUR *INITIATIVE* -- ON *ANTICIPATING* THE *CREATOR'S* WHIMS -- AFTER ALL!

HEY -- YOU KNOW WHO THIS KID *REMINDS* ME OF?

WHAT'S'ER NAME -- *LISSETH!* AND LOOK HOW *SHE* TURNED OUT!

AND WHY IS IT AGAIN THAT WE NEVER GOT TO *JUDGE HER?!*

LISSETH IS BESIDE THE *POINT* -- ANOTHER CAN OF WORMS ENTIRELY!

CAN WE PLEASE JUST DEAL WITH THE *BOY* FOR NOW?!

WHO IS LISSETH?!

NO MATTER WHAT MICHAEL SAYS, LISSETH IS EXACTLY WHY WE'RE HERE, IN A WAY...

...IF IT WEREN'T FOR HER ACTIONS EONS AGO, YOU'D BE WORRYING ABOUT YOUR PROM TODAY.

WHY DOES HER NAME KEEP COMING UP LATELY?!

TOO MUCH TALKING!

WE'VE NO TIME FOR PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATES -- OR ANCIENT HISTORY LESSONS. WE'RE HERE TO DECIDE ALEX ELDER'S FATE!

IF THIS IS A TRIAL, WHY CAN'T I SPEAK IN MY OWN DEFENSE?

-SIGH-

WHY DOES EVERYONE ASSUME THAT HEAVEN IS A DEMOCRACY?

BUT -- LEST ANYONE SAY I'M NOT ACCOMMODATING -- SPEAK YOUR PIECE.

"SIX MONTHS AGO, I WAS A PRETTY NORMAL KID. NOT SO SHALLOW AS TO BE WORRYING ONLY ABOUT THE PROM, BUT NORMAL.

"IN FACT, MY GIRLFRIEND JULIE AND I WERE TRYING TO MAKE PLANS BEYOND HIGH-SCHOOL... FOR ALL THE GOOD THOSE PLANS ARE NOW.

"ALL HOPE DIED WITH ME THE NIGHT MY FRIENDS AND I WERE ATTACKED BY A PSYCHO VAMPIRE GANG --

"-- LED BY THE QUEEN-BITCH, ROSE THE PUPPET!

"BEFORE I COULD BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED, I WAS ONE OF THEM --

"-- A BLOODSUCKING PREDATOR...

"...IN THE CHARGE OF A STONE-FACED MONSTER NAMED EKIMUS -- A GUY WHO KEEPS INSISTING I'M A 'CHOSEN ONE'...

"...CHOSEN TO SUFFER, MAYBE.

"ROSE MURDERED JULIE TO GET MY ATTENTION...

"...SO I KILLED ROSE."

THAT'S MY ONLY CRIME.

THAT WAS NOT A CRIME, IT WAS JUSTICE -- AND IT'S NOT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT.

THIS IS ABOUT YOUR POWER.

I NEVER ASKED FOR POWER -- OR THE CURSE THAT GOES WITH IT. WHY NOT JUST MAKE ME HUMAN AGAIN...?

IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY. WE CAN'T UNDO WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED, WE CAN ONLY JUDGE -- TO SAVE...OR ERASE.

WHICH FATE WILL BE YOURS IS NOW UP TO OUR VOTE...

FOR ALL THE REASONS I'VE ENUMERATED, I VOTE FOR TERMINATION.

YEAH... FRY THE PUNK!

WE HAVE TO SPARE HIM -- WE CAN'T PUNISH HIM FOR WHAT HE MIGHT DO!

OH, BOO-HOO, YOU'RE BREAKIN' MY HEART.

GABRIELLE?

RAPHAEL'S RIGHT -- WHAT ABOUT THE BOY'S FREE WILL?

OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE, GABRIELLE, DON'T BE FOOLISH -- DECIDE! FREE WILL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS!

BUT IT DOES, MICHAEL. THE BOY HAS THE GOD-GIVEN RIGHT TO CHOOSE HIS OWN PATH -- THAT'S THE WAY IT WORKS!

AND I REMAIN UNCONVINCED THAT HE WILL CHOOSE EVIL. THERE'S...SOMETHING ABOUT THE BOY THAT...THAT...

...I VOTE TO SPARE HIM.

WHATEVER! STILL, IT'S A VOTE OF *FIVE* FOR, *TWO* AGAINST -- CORRECT GENTLEMEN?

RIGHT.

UM... NO?

WHAT?! ARE YOU *CHALLENGING* ME, RAGUEL?!

N-NO, MICHAEL -- *NO!* BUT WE DON'T *KNOW* WHAT THE *BOSS* REALLY WANTS HERE -- RUSHING TO JUDGMENT COULD BE A *MAJOR* MISTAKE...!

I THINK WE NEED TO, UH...*SPARE* HIM.

BALONEY! THE VOTE IS *STILL* *FOUR* TO *THREE* -- WE *WIN*...AND THE KID *LOSES!*

DO HIM, MIKE!

PARADISE DINED

ALEX ELDER, YOUR SENTENCE IS TO *PERISH* BY THE BLADE OF THE *SWORD OF TRUTH...*

SHOOM

HOLD UP THERE, BIG GUY -- ALL THE *PRECINCTS* HAVEN'T *REPORTED* YET!

WHAT...?

WELL, WELL, WELL -- QUITE THE *KODAK MOMENT* YOU'VE GOT HERE.

HEY, DON'T LOOK SO *SURPRISED* EVERYBODY -- I KNOW IT'S BEEN A *LONG TIME*, BUT I'M STILL PART OF THE *FAMILY*.

YOU'RE NO FAMILY OF *MINE*... LUCIFER.

NO ONE *INVITED YOU*. YOU'RE *OFF* THE ROLLS!

GOOD OLD GABRIELLE. ALWAYS *ANNOUNCING* THE OBVIOUS.

HEY, RAPHIE-BOY, HOW'S MY FAVORITE *HEALER* -- AND BLEEDING HEART?

BUT WHAT'S A *GOOD SOLDIER* LIKE YOU DOING WITH THESE *LIBERALS*, RAGS, OLD BUDDY?

NOW, I EXPECT *BLOOD-THIRSTY* BOYOS LIKE YOU TWO BACK MIKEY'S PLAY.

HOW'S THE *ANGEL OF DEATH* BUSINESS, ZAURIEL? NICE *EARTHQUAKE* LAST WEEK, BY THE WAY.

AND URIEL, M'MAN -- YOU REALLY TAKE THIS *PLAGUE ANGEL* BIT TO *HEART* DON'T YOU? INTERESTING WORK WITH *AIDS* -- ESPECIALLY SINCE IT BRINGS OUT THE VERY *WORST* IN A BUNCH OF FOLKS WHO *DON'T* EVEN HAVE IT...

AND OF COURSE, *HORN-BOY*, REMIEL. MIKEY SAYS *JUMP* AND YOU SAY *"HOW HIGH?"*... LIKE A GOOD DOG!

AND YOU WONDER WHY YOU DON'T GET *INVITATIONS*. WHAT DO YOU *WANT*, SERPENT?

I WANT MY *VOTE*, MICHAEL. I'M ENTITLED -- I MAY BE *BANISHED*, BUT I NEVER GOT A MEMO RESCINDING *THAT* RIGHT.

YOU HAVE *NO* RIGHTS HERE. LEAVE.

MAKE ME.

I CAN DO THAT.

I DID IT ONCE BEFORE...!

PERHAPS, BUT I HAVE BEEN PRACTICING!

THIS ISN'T ABOUT THE BOY. WE'LL DO IT ANOTHER TIME.

YES.

VOTE, THEN, IF YOU WANT. GET THIS IDIOCY FINISHED.

THAT'S SOMETHING YOUNG MASTER ELDER HERE WOULD *CERTAINLY* ENDORSE -- EH, ALEX?

I *LIKE* YOU KID -- BECAUSE YOU LIKE THE *RANGERS.* IT'S NOT *MUCH* OF A REASON, BUT IT'S *ENOUGH* FOR ME.

HOCKEY'S ALL WE HAVE IN *COMMON*, THEN. WHAT'S YOUR *VOTE?*

GEE, THE KID DOESN'T *LIKE* WHAT I STAND FOR -- WHAT'S HELL COMING TO, WHEN I CAN'T EVEN GET A *VAMPIRE* TO DO *BAD DEEDS!*

STILL, I LIKE *HIM.* AND, AFTER CAREFUL CONSULTATION WITH MY *ADVISORS,* I *VOTE* --

-- WAIT FOR IT --

-- *NO.*

NO?! DOES HIS VOTE *COUNT?*

IF IT DOES, WE HAVE A *TIE* -- A *HUNG JURY!*

"A TIE GOES *IN FAVOR OF THE ACCUSED* --" DOCTRINE 134, 789-B, TENET 391, SUBSECTION C-17.

FOOD

Cooked AND PREPARED TO YOUR SATISFACTION

EXACTLY.

DOES IT MEAN I'M *FREE* TO GO?

THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS, KID. YOU'RE FREE -- FOR *NOW.*

I SUGGEST WE RECONVENE IN ONE *CENTURY* -- A HUNDRED YEARS OUGHT TO BE ENOUGH TO SEE HOW THE KID *TURNS OUT.*

IF THE WORLD SURVIVES THE COMING *MILLENNIUM,* EH?

IT'S A *DATE.*

IF *YOU* SURVIVE THE *MILLENNIUM.*

IT ISN'T GOING TO *STAY* THIS WAY FOREVER, LUCIFER -- SOMEDAY YOU AND I WILL *FINISH* OUR BUSINESS.

I LOOK FORWARD TO IT.

AND NEXT TIME, I'M *BRINGING* THE MEMO.

SO... *BRIGHT.*

ALL THE MORE EVIDENCE OF YOUR *PECULIARITY*, KID -- A GARDEN VARIETY VAMPIRE WOULD BE *VAPORIZED* BY THESE *HEAVENLY* HI-BEAMS.

GIVES EVEN *ME* A HEAD-ACHE.

OKAY, ALEX -- YOU'RE *SPARED!* NOW, GET *OUTTA* HERE!

WAIT -- IF YOU'RE *SATAN*, WHY'D YOU *HELP* ME?

I HAVE MY *REASONS* -- BUT I DIDN'T DO IT FOR *YOU.* NOW *GO*, I'M EXPECTING MORE COMPANY ANY TIME NOW.

GO FULFILL YOUR DESTINY... AND *FORGET* YOU WERE EVER HERE.

WHAT GOOD'S A HUNDRED YEAR REVIEW IF YOU *KNOW* THEY'RE WATCHING?

1405

MERRY CHRISTMAS

JNGL

SURE... *NOW* YOU SHOW UP. YOU GIVE THEM *WAY* TOO MUCH LATITUDE, YOU KNOW...

...AND WE *BOTH* KNOW THAT *INDEPENDENCE* IS NOT SOMETHING AN ANGEL HANDLES VERY WELL.

I MEAN, *LOOK AROUND* -- THEY SWOOPED DOWN ON THESE POOR SINNERS AND WENT *OLD TESTAMENT* ON THEIR ASSES.

DON'T GET ME *WRONG*, I'LL TAKE THE CONDEMNED *SOULS* YOU SEND MY WAY...

...BUT SINCE *JUNIOR*, AREN'T YOU DOING THAT WHOLE *FORGIVENESS THING* NOW?

I'M *RIGHT*, AREN'T I? I DO KEEP UP WITH THE LITERATURE -- -- THE BETTER TO *MESS* WITH THE SHEEP, YOU KNOW...?

WHAT'S THAT --? *FORGIVENESS* IS FOR *EVERYONE* -- EVEN... *ME*?

AND GIVE UP *SHOW BIZ*? NO THANKS.

BESIDES, WE BOTH KNOW THAT *I'M* VITAL TO THE EQUATION..

...WHAT GOOD IS *CHOOSING YOU*, IF THEY DON'T HAVE ANOTHER *OPTION*...?

...ISN'T THAT *RIGHT*... *BOSS*?

NICE SNOW-SUIT, BY THE WAY.

OR MAYBE I'M JUST NOT READY TO GO *STRAIGHT.*

BYE.

WELL, *THERE'S* A *SHOCKER* -- LEFT A LITTLE GIFT OF *MERCY* BEHIND, AFTER ALL.

AH WELL, THE SUN IS MADE TO RISE ON THE EVIL AND THE GOOD.

AND I GET *SNOW.* EVENING, EKIMUS.

YOUR BOY'S *FINE.* YOU *OWE* ME.

WOW, HOW COME YOU'RE STILL *OUT* IN THIS BAD WEATHER, SWEETIE?

ONE MORE FLOWER TO SELL, EH?

SORRY, I'M FLAT BROKE RIGHT NOW.

I -- *WHAT?*

A... GIFT -- FOR *ME?* THANKS...

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

CHAPTER
EIGHT
CROSSROADS

HER NAME IS SCARLET X. SHE IS A MEMBER OF THE SECRET AND SACRED SOCIETY OF THE **RED HOOD.**

LIKE ALL MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP, SHE HAS BEEN TRAINED FROM **BIRTH** IN THE ART OF **HUNTING** AND **KILLING** OF ALL THINGS **SUPERNATURAL.**

AT THE MOMENT, SCARLET IS THE ONLY ACTIVE RED HOOD IN THE NEW YORK AREA. JUST WEEKS AGO, MANY OF HER FELLOWS WERE **SLAUGHTERED** BY A PACK OF SAVAGE **WOLF** CHILDREN -- IN THE SERVICE OF A **VAMPIRIC** POLITICAL CONSPIRACY.

BIZARRE AS THAT MAY SOUND, SCARLET HAS APPROACHED HER TASK WITH DEADLY SERIOUSNESS -- WITH VERY GOOD CAUSE. AMONG THOSE KILLED BY THE BEASTS WAS HER LIFELONG PARTNER AND FUTURE **MATE,** LUC.

SCARLET HAS SEEN THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HER ATTACKS BRUTALLY **SLAIN,** BUT HER REVENGE REMAINS INCOMPLETE SO LONG AS THE ANIMALS STILL DRAW BREATH.

WITHIN MOMENTS, SCARLET EXPECTS TO TIE OFF THAT FINAL LOOSE THREAD...

HER HUNTING SKILLS ARE PRETERNATURAL, BEYOND EVEN THE INTENSIVE TRAINING SHE HAS RECEIVED FROM HER EARLIEST DAYS. BEYOND, PERHAPS, THE OTHERS OF HER KIND.

SCARLET KNOWS HER PREY --

SK UUF

-- THEIR SCENT, MARKINGS, SPOOR --

-- THEY WILL NOT ELUDE HER...

...AND SHE WILL NOT STOP SHORT OF THE CREATURES' UTTER DESTRUCTION.

HER TRAINING REQUIRES IT, HER HEART DEMANDS IT.

HARVEST

DIABLES!

ARRORRO

RE-BELD
PUNK

ARRÊT -- STOP!

HOOF--!

SKLATTER

NON--!

THIP

SACRÊMENT!

THE *BEASTS* WILL HAVE ESCAPED BY *NOW!*

QUEL --?

PERHAPS THEY HAVE *NOT* GOTTEN FAR *ENOUGH* THOUGH.

WHY ARE THEY JUST *STANDING* THERE?!

RRRRR?

MOVING TARGETS OR *STILL* -- THEY ARE *MINE.*

CAN IT BE THAT THESE CREATURES ARE MERE *DUMB* ANIMALS?

LEGEND HAS IT THAT CREATURES OF THE SUPERNATURAL MAY NOT CROSS ABOVE MOVING WATER...

...AND EVEN THE SLUGGISH EAST RIVER FLOWS ENOUGH TO FREEZE THESE DOOMED BEASTS IN THEIR TRACKS.

RAHR

RROOOHHOOWROOO

GO BACK TO HELL...!

TWANG TWANG TWANG

AIEEEEEEEEEE

FIN.

THE BRIEFLY CHURNED WATER SETTLES, AND THE LAST OF THE CHILDREN OF JUDAS SINKS TO THE MURKY RIVER BOTTOM.

THE BEASTS ARE FINALLY EXTINCT.

SPLOOSH

SPLOOSH

THEY WERE ONLY *CHILDREN*, BUT THEY'RE *BETTER OFF* NOW.

EH? *WHAT* IS THIS NOW...?

THEY DID NOT *CHOOSE* THEIR ACTIONS, BUT TOO MANY OF THOSE I LOVE ARE DEAD BECAUSE OF THEM.

MAY THEY *ALL* REST IN PEACE.

St. Brigid Hospital

EKIMUS? INTERESANT.

WHAT IS THIS ONE DOING *HERE?*

GOOD EVENING, MR. ELDER. MY NAME IS EKIMUS. I AM OF THE *GRIGORI* -- A *RACE* OF CREATURES APART OF HUMANITY, NOW EXTINCT SAVE FOR ME.

IT HAS FALLEN TO ME TO KEEP WATCH OVER YOUR SON, ALEX.

WE NEED TO *SPEAK*, SIR -- THOUGH, GIVEN YOUR *CONDITION*, PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY THAT *I* NEED TO SPEAK *TO* YOU.

I WOULD HAVE NOT BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE...

... BUT I AM PLAGUED OF LATE BY PANGS OF *CONSCIENCE.*

THIS IS SOMETHING *NEW. GUILT* IS EXCEEDINGLY RARE TO ME -- AND WE GRIGORI FOUGHT ALONGSIDE *LUCIFER* IN HIS REBELLION AGAINST *HEAVEN.*

FOR THIS *TRANSGRESSION* I WAS *EXILED* FROM EDEN, CURSED WITH *IMMORTAL* LIFE, AND...

...BUT I AM NOT HERE TO SPEAK OF *MYSELF.* I AM HERE TO TELL YOU OF YOUR *SON...*

"...ALEX."

THAP

HELLO, SCARLET. MISSED *AGAIN.*

I HAVE *NEVER* MISSED YOU -- EXCEPT BY *CHOICE!*

YOU MIGHT RECALL THAT I'VE *SAVED* YOU *SEVERAL* TIMES -- IN *DIRECT* OPPOSITION TO MY SWORN *DUTY* AS A *RED HOOD!*

WE ARE *SUPPOSED* TO *ELIMINATE ALL* VAMPIRES!

GO AHEAD!

MAYBE YOU'D BE DOING ME A *FAVOR!*

...

YOU SAD LITTLE *ENFANT* -- *PERHAPS I SHOULD!*

BUT... *NON.* I CAME TO DO YOU YET *ANOTHER* FAVOR.

SPANNG

TO TAKE YOU TO *SEE* SOMETHING OF *GREAT* INTEREST -- AND SO I *SHALL.* IF YOUR *SELF-PITY* WILL ALLOW...?

SELF-PITY?!

I AM *SIXTEEN,* AND ALREADY I HAVE BEEN *KILLED* AND TURNED INTO A *VAMPIRE!* I HAVE SEEN MY GIRLFRIEND *MURDERED!* I'M SUPPOSED TO BE SOME SORT OF *"CHOSEN-ONE,"* BUT NO ONE WILL TELL ME WHAT THAT *MEANS!*

AND JUST *DAYS* AGO, I WAS PUT ON A *TRIAL* FOR MY *LIFE* -- BY *ARCH-ANGELS!* IF *THAT* DOESN'T *ENTITLE* ME TO A *BAD MOOD* --!

AND IT JUST GETS *WEIRDER!* KNOW WHY THE ANGELS *SPARED* ME?!

BECAUSE *SATAN VOUCHED* FOR ME!

-- HMMMFFF

I AM SORRY... I'M SURE THAT IT IS ALL *TRUE* -- AND *TRÈS TRAGIQUE* -- BUT IT SOUNDS *SO-O-O-O... STUPID* WHEN YOU SAY IT --

HEH HEH HEH...

HEH HEH

HAHAHA HAHAHA HA

WELL, THEN IF YOUR MOOD IS *LIGHTENING,* PERHAPS WE CAN GO... SEE MY... *SURPRISE?*

LEAD *ON.* BUT I DOUBT THAT *ANYTHING* CAN SURPRISE ME ANY LONGER.

SO YOUNG... SO NAIVE...

...SO WRONG.

IT MIGHT BE THAT YOU WILL FIND AT LEAST *SOME* OF THE ANSWERS YOU *SEEK.*

OH --? CAN *YOU* TELL ME WHAT A *"CHOSEN ONE"* IS?

NO, ALAS. BUT LEST YOU THINK YOU ARE ALONE IN LIVING A LIFE OF *STRANGENESS,* I WILL TELL YOU... A *FAIRY TALE...*

"...ONCE UPON A TIME..."

A-HUH A-HUH A-HUH

UHH --?!

WHERE'RE YOU MOSEYIN' TO, COWBOY?

THINK YOU'RE WRONG THERE, TRUDY -- HE ISN'T NO COWBOY -- HE'S AN INDIAN!

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, TONTO --?

YAHH

RRHHH!

"THINGS ARE SELDOM WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE..."

...AND ALEX'S STRANGE *FATE* IS NO *DIFFERENT*.

I APOLOGIZE FOR THE *ABSOLUTE AGONY* THAT YOUR FAMILY MUST BE EXPERIENCING OVER THE *LOSS* OF YOUR SON.

BUT, BELIEVE ME, MR. ELDER, SOMETIMES *NOT* KNOWING IS BETTER THAN THE *TRUTH*. AT LEAST *EASIER*.

YOUR SON HAS BECOME A *VITAL* PART OF SOMETHING ALMOST *TOO VAST* FOR EVEN ME TO *FULLY* GRASP.

IT IS NOT OVERLY *MELODRAMATIC* TO SAY THAT ALEX MAY WELL ALTER THE FATE OF THE *EARTH*, ITSELF.

-SIGH-

HOW ABSURDLY *GRANDIOSE* THAT MUST SOUND. BUT TO *ME* IT IS *PROSAIC*... COMMONPLACE.

I SURRENDERED MY CLAIM TO BLISSFUL IGNORANCE IN THE *WAR* AGAINST *HEAVEN*. THOUGH I *YEARN* BEYOND UTTERANCE FOR AN END TO MY *OUTRÉ* EXISTENCE --

-- IT HAS PROVEN AS *ELUSIVE* AS MY *REDEMPTION*.

MY *SINS* DID NOT END WITH EXPULSION FROM *PARADISE* A *BILLION* YEARS AGO.

THERE WAS *ANOTHER* EXILE. HER NAME WAS *LISSETH*, AND IN SEEKING SOLACE IN OUR COMMON FORTUNES, WE BROUGHT FORTH A *PLAGUE* THAT MAY SOON DRAIN THIS WORLD OF ITS *LIFEBLOOD*.

LISSETH IS THE *MOTHER* OF *ALL VAMPIRES*, MR. ELDER, AND -- GOD FORGIVE ME -- *I* AM THE *FATHER*!

BUT NOW THE TIME HAS COME FOR MY CURSED *BLOOD-LINE* TO *TERMINATE*! TIME FOR LISSETH'S PLAN OF *VAMPIRIC DOMINATION* TO *DIE*--!

-- AND *HER* WITH IT!

"...THIS TALE TAKES PLACE SEVERAL HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN HAMEAU -- A SMALL TOWN IN ALSACE...

"...IT IS HERE THAT WE FIRST MEET A ***BEAUTIFUL*** YOUNG... ENTREPRENEUR NAMED ***MARRAINE.*** SHE AND HER FRIENDS WERE IN THE... ***COMFORT*** BUSINESS.

"...AND THE ***RED-HOODS*** THEY WORE WAS THEIR... SIGN OF ***OFFICE*** -- A WAY TO ENSURE THAT THE DRUNKEN FOOLS DID NOT FOIST THEIR CRUDE LUSTS UPON THE UPRIGHT LADIES OF THE TOWN.

TOBACCO

JULES TAVERN

Auberge du Roi

"***RED*** HAS EVER BEEN THE COLOR OF MARRAINE'S OCCUPATION.

"AMONG HER OWN, MARRAINE WAS ***ROYALTY*** -- THUS IT WAS ONLY ***RIGHT*** THAT THE STRANGE ***NOBLEMAN*** WOULD BE DRAWN TO HER.

"MUCH TO HER LATER ***HORROR.***

"ALL SHE KNEW AT THE ***TIME,*** HOWEVER, WAS THAT A CHARMING GENTLEMAN OF OBVIOUS SUBSTANCE FANCIED HER. AND MARRAINE HAD A SOFT SPOT FOR HANDSOME MEN -- VERY SOFT.

"HER CARRIAGE SWEPT THEM AWAY TO HIS ***CHALET*** -- WHERE THEY PREPARED TO ENJOY THEIR MUTUAL ATTRACTION..."

"WHEN IT DEVELOPED THAT THIS GENTLEMAN HAD VERY... *SPECIFIC* AND *RAREFIED* TASTES, MARRAINE WAS UNCONCERNED...

"...SHE WAS, AFTER ALL, AN EXPERIENCED *PROFESSIONAL* -- WHO HAD SEEN *EVERYTHING*...

"...BUT SHE WAS SO VERY *WRONG.*

"*SOME* THINGS NO AMOUNT OF *EXPERIENCE* CAN PREPARE ONE FOR.

"THE BEAST-MAN *INVENTED* NEW DEPTHS OF *SADISM* THAT NIGHT -- HE BROUGHT THE POOR WOMAN TO THE BRINK OF *DEATH* MANY TIMES...

"...BUT SUSTAINED HER ON THAT RAZOR'S EDGE FOR *HOURS* -- TO PROLONG HIS *UNHOLY PLEASURE,* ONE SUPPOSES..."

SPLURSH

GEORGE--? ISN'T THAT *ENOUGH* CATSUP?

HEINZ TOMATO KETCHUP

GEORGE--?!

HUH--? I'M SORRY, HONEY -- GUESS I WAS JUST *DAY-DREAMING...*

IS THAT *ALL* IT IS, GEORGE? ARE YOU FEELING... *OKAY?*

SURE... I'M JUST... A BIT *SPACEY*, S'ALL. THANKS TO MY WEIRD DREAMS I'M NOT *SLEEPING* WELL, BUT IT'LL *PASS.*

MAYBE YOU SHOULD SEE... A *DOCTOR?* DOESN'T THE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAVE PEOPLE ON STAFF?

I DON'T NEED A DOC--

--UHHH...?

ALL *EVIL* MUST *DIE!*

NO MORE INNOCENT BLOOD WILL BE *SHED!*

SKUSH SKUSH SKUSH SKUSH

UH...?

UGH!

WH-WHAT...? LORD... I'D BETTER GO SEE A DOCTOR.

OH... YEAH.

HONEY... PLEASE, DON'T *LOOK* AT ME LIKE THAT.

I'LL GET *HELP.* EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY -- *TRUST* ME.

HOW?! GEORGE, CAN'T YOU SEE THAT *NOTHING'S* GOING TO BE *OKAY* -- THAT *EVERYTHING* IS GOING TO *HELL?!*

YOU *KNOW* I'D NEVER HARM YOU OR ANDREW...

H-HONESTLY, *NO* -- I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING FOR SURE ANYMORE.

NO. NO MORE *WEIRDNESS...* I *PROMISE...*

SNARL

"-- AND SO CAME WELL-ARMED WITH ***SILVER-TIPPED*** ARROWS.

"THE MONSTER DIED ***QUICKLY.*** A MERCY DENIED HIS MANY ***VICTIMS.***

"FOR ALL HER ***DREADFUL*** INJURIES, A SPARK OF ***LIFE*** FLICKERED TENACIOUSLY IN MARRAINE'S BREAST -- A SPARK FANNED TO A BLAZE BY THE HEAT OF HER ***OUTRAGE*** AND ***VIOLATION.***

"POOR MARRAINE WOULD HAVE DIED -- ***SHOULD*** HAVE, PERHAPS -- SAVE FOR THE SLIGHTLY LESS THAN ***TIMELY*** ARRIVAL OF A BRAVE ***HUNTSMAN...***

"THE HUNTSMAN HAD ALREADY BEEN ***STALKING*** THE BEAST -- HE HAD LOST A ***SISTER*** TO THE THING'S SAVAGERY --

"AND SO TIME PASSED, AND MARRAINE HEALED AS MUCH AS SHE COULD -- BUT NOT NEARLY ENOUGH TO RETURN TO HER PREVIOUS ***OCCUPATION.***

"WHICH WAS FINE WITH MARRAINE. HER RESCUER -- HIS NAME WAS ALAINE -- HAD FALLEN IN ***LOVE*** WITH HER, AND SHE OWED HIM HER LIFE. AND SO THEY WERE WED.

"AND SOON, A SPARK OF ANOTHER KIND OF LIFE GREW WITHIN MARRAINE...

"***TWO*** LIVES, IN FACT. BUT, THOUGH HE WOULD RAISE THEM AS HIS OWN. ALAINE WAS ***NOT*** THE FATHER."

"AT SIX, THE BOY AND GIRL BEGAN THEIR ***ARCHERY*** TRAINING...

"...BY ***EIGHT,*** THEY WERE MARKSMEN.

"SINCE BOTH PARENTS LIVES HAD BEEN SCARRED BY ENCOUNTERS WITH ***EVIL*** SORCERY, IT HAD BEEN DETERMINED THAT THE CHILDREN WOULD BECOME ***INSTRUMENTS*** OF REVENGE.

"THE TWO LOVED THEIR PARENTS, AND, IN FACT, HAD BEEN RAISED FOR NO OTHER PURPOSE. THEY WENT GLADLY ALONG WITH THESE HARSH PLANS.

"AND WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL ***DUKE,*** AND THE ***BLESSING*** OF THEIR BISHOP, THE MISSION BECAME ***OFFICIAL.***

"SO WAS BORN THE ***ORDER OF THE RED HOOD*** -- A NAME STEEPED IN THE SHAME OF MARRAINE'S EARLIER LIFE -- AND NEAR-DEATH -- BUT WORN INSTEAD AS A ***BADGE*** OF ***HONOR.***

"THE CHILDREN'S NAMES WERE ***ROUGE*** AND ***ECARLATE*** -- ***SCARLET*** -- THIMBALILD. THEY WERE THE FIRST..."

WAIT -- SCARLET?

I DON'T GET IT -- THAT WAS YOU...?

DON'T BE *RIDICULE* -- THAT WAS *FOUR-HUNDRED* YEARS AGO. WE ARE OBSESSIVE, BUT WE ARE *NOT IMMORTAL.*

THE FAMILY HAS KEPT THE ORDER *ALIVE* ALL THIS TIME, AND ALL BOYS AND GIRLS ARE NAMED AFTER OUR FOREBEARS IN *TRIBUTE.*

SO, YOU'RE *STUCK* IN THE *FAMILY BUSINESS,* EH -- *BUMMER.*

IT IS NO JOKE, ALEX. IT IS A SACRED DUTY -- AND A MATTER OF HONOR. FAMILY HONOR.

AND, THOUGH WE CANNOT *CHOOSE* TO PASS THIS VOCATION BY -- IT IS ONE I PURSUE MOST *WILLINGLY.* I ASSUMED *YOU* MIGHT UNDERSTAND FAMILY OBLIGATIONS...

I'M... I'M *SORRY,* SCARLET.

I APPRECIATE YOU TELLING THIS STORY TO GIVE MY MISERY SOME *CONTEXT* -- BUT OUR LIVES AREN'T *THAT* SIMILAR REALLY...

...YOU MAY BE *BORN* INTO A VERY WEIRD JOB, BUT I'VE BEEN TURNED INTO A *MONSTER* AND *SEPARATED* FROM *MY* FAMILY...

THE FIRST SCARLET AND ROUGE WERE THE OFFSPRING OF MARRAINE AND THE *BEAST* WHO RAPED HER! MY BLOODLINE IS *LOUPE GAROU -- WEREWOLF --* AND WE ALL SHARE THAT *STRAIN!*

AT THIRTEEN, WE MUST ALL GO THROUGH THE CEREMONY OF *TESTING* AND *SEALING* -- TO ENSURE THAT THAT *BLOOD* DOES NOT *RULE* OUR LIVES.

OVER THE COURSE OF COUNTLESS GENERATIONS, *MANY* HAVE NOT SURVIVED THE TESTING -- THE *WOLF-BLOOD* BURNED TOO STRONGLY IN THEIR VEINS!

AS FOR *FAMILY* --MOST OF *MINE* WERE *SLAUGHTERED* IN STEINMAN'S *AMBUSH* LAST MONTH.

INCLUDING THE ONE I WAS TO *MARRY* -- MY BELOVED *LUC.*

I LOST A LOVED ONE *TOO.* I GUESS WE'RE MORE *SIMILAR* THAN I THOUGHT. I'M REALLY *SORRY.*

OH, *ALEX...* I AM SO *ADRIFT* -- WHAT AM I TO DO *NOW?!*

I DON'T KNOW, SCARLET, MY LIFE'S JUST AS SCREWED UP.

IS *THIS* WHAT YOU WANTED TO SHOW ME? THE STORY... THE SILVER SEAL?

NO. LOOK DOWN THERE...

St. Brigid Hospital

THE *HOSPITAL* WHERE MY *FATHER* IS? I DON'T GET IT -- AM I SUPPOSED TO GO *VISIT?*

PERHAPS YOU *SHOULD,* ALEX -- IT WILL BE *EDIFYING.*

GOOD-BYE, MY FRIEND.

WHO'S VISITING DAD?

?!

EKIMUS?!

FREEZE, POLICE!

NO PARKING FROM 6:00 AM TO 7:00 PM

WHO DARES INTRUDE...?

SHUT UP -- AND BACK OFF!

IT IS *HIM!* *RUN SISTERS!*

WHAT THE HELL...?

GEORGE...? IT IS *YOU?*

HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NA -- *HOLY GOD!* -- WHAT ARE *YOU?!*

...DOESN'T MATTER. I HAVE... *TRAVELED* A GREAT... DISTANCE TO FIND YOU...

...*SAINT GEORGE!*

IT IS *TIME* FOR YOU *AGAIN*... FOLLOW THE *DREAMS*... LIVE YOUR *LEGACY*... ONCE MORE!

TAKE *THIS* -- THE EARTH AWAITS... YUUUHHH...

WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT...?

GEORGE -- I CALLED 911 -- HOW IS...?

DEAD. WHOEVER HE WAS...

WHAT'S GOING ON, GEORGE?

I DON'T KNOW -- I DON'T *UNDERSTAND* ANYTHING. BUT I *DO* -- SUDDENLY -- -- KNOW THAT I HAVE TO GO *AWAY* FOR A *WHILE*...

WHAT--?!

NO -- YOU *CAN'T!*

I *HAVE* TO, DEAR... I DON'T THINK I HAVE ANY *CHOICE.*

IT MAY BE THE *ONLY* WAY TO SETTLE ALL THIS *WEIRDNESS* I'M GOING THROUGH.

I DON'T KNOW *WHY*, BUT SOMETHING IS... *CALLING* TO ME -- URGING ME TO SOME... *QUEST.*

DAD --?

I *LOVE* YOU BOTH, AND I *WILL* BE BACK. BUT I *HAVE* TO GO...

...I HAD THOUGHT HER *GONE* FOR GOOD, BUT NOW I *KNOW* THAT LISSETH IS COMING BACK WITH A *VENGEANCE.*

ONLY *ALEX* HAS THE POWER TO STAND *AGAINST* HER.

ALEX WAS *BRED* AS A *NEW* KIND OF *VAMPIRE* -- ONLY *HE* HAS A CHANCE TO ULTIMATELY *VANQUISH* HER.

LISSETH *KNOWS* THIS AND WILL ATTEMPT TO KILL ALEX *FIRST.*

PERHAPS ALEX WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF IF I HAD NOT STOPPED ROSE FROM *DESTROYING* HIM --

-- SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE ALLOWED HIM TO *RISE* AS VAMPIRIC COMPETITION...

...BUT ROSE WAS AN UNWITTING COG IN A COSMIC SCHEME -- AND ONCE *INFECTED*, ALEX *HAD* TO SURVIVE!

AND HE *HAD* TO BE FURTHER *TRANSFORMED* INTO THE UNIQUE ENTITY HE IS!

I ALONE WAS EMPOWERED TO EFFECT THAT *EVOLUTIONARY* LEAP.

I HAD TO MAKE ALEX INTO A *VAMPIRE* TO DESTROY *ALL OTHER* VAMPIRES!

SKREECH

YOU CURSED ME WITH THIS *DAMNED* LIFE?!

ALEX... I... I HAD NO *CHOICE* -- IT WAS *DECREED* NECESSARY! IT IS YOUR *FATE!*

THE *HELL* WITH *THAT* -- YOU USED ME -- *DESTROYED* MY *LIFE* AND MY *FAMILY* FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR *STUPID* **MUMBO-JUMBO!**

I WON'T HELP YOU ANY MORE!

I HATE YOU!

THE MONASTERY OF SAINT BENEDICT. RHEIMS, FRANCE.

...RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CHINA SLOW OUR EFFORTS BEHIND THE WALL.

PERHAPS, BUT HONG KONG IS A NEW **WEDGE** FOR US, WE WILL EVENTUALLY **PREVAIL.**

MONSEIGNEUR THIMBAULD! ABBÉ PHILIP!

IT HAS **HAPPENED!** THE **PROPHECY** IS **FULFILLED!**

ARE WE **SURE?!** WHEN DID WORD COME?

A SHORT TIME AGO -- WE JUST **NOW** PUT ALL THE PIECES TOGETHER!

HAS **MONSIEUR D'ORENCE** BEEN NOTIFIED?

HE IS ON HIS WAY, EMINENCE...

I **HOPE** THIS ISN'T ANOTHER **MISTAKE...** REMEMBER, WE THOUGHT THE TIME HAD COME **THIRTY-FIVE** YEARS AGO -- WITH THE **CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS.**

THIS IS THE **REAL** THING, BROTHER... BE SURE OF THAT... ... AS **MASTER Ttemplar,** IT IS MY DUTY TO BE **CERTAIN!**

what in Kirsuwa amazon rain forest destr Pakistani nuclear test

CHAPTER
NINE
RAPTUS

THEY HAD CROSSED THE BORDER INTO CANADA TWO HOURS EARLIER. THE OLD HIGHWAY HAD BEEN TOO SMALL TO RATE A CUSTOMS STATION.

TECHNICALLY, GEORGE DAVIS REALIZED, HE WAS NOW AN ILLEGAL ALIEN.

IN CANADA, MAYBE -- BUT ILLEGAL ALL THE SAME.

DESPITE ALL THE CRAZINESS OF HIS RECENT LIFE, GEORGE WAS STILL TOO MUCH OF A COP TO TAKE IT LIGHTLY.

HE WORRIED ABOUT IT FOR EXACTLY FOURTEEN POINT SEVEN MILES -- OR TWENTY-THREE POINT FIVE KILOMETERS, TO BE REGIONALLY ACCURATE.

THE FACT IS, GEORGE THOUGHT, HE'D BEEN AN ALIEN FOR SOME TIME NOW. EVER SINCE THE DREAMS HAD BEGUN. THE DREAMS OF BEING SAINT GEORGE.

THE DREAMS THAT HAD LED HIM HERE IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS...

...THAT HAD RIPPED HIM FROM THE COMFORT AND LOVE OF HIS FAMILY.

DREAMS THAT HAD, GEORGE WAS AFRAID, DRIVEN HIM COMPLETELY PSYCHO.

THIS' IT, MISTER...

CAP

IT WAS ALL NUTS. WHAT DID AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN KNIGHT HAVE TO DO WITH A TRIBE OF NATIVE AMERICANS?

MAYBE THAT AND OTHER ANSWERS WAITED JUST AHEAD. BUT AS HE WALKED, GEORGE DAVIS' ONLY CERTAINTY WAS THAT EVERYTHING WOULD ONLY GET WEIRDER.

THE VILLAGE OF OROQUODDY; ST. GEORGE BAY, NEW BRUNSWICK.

NOW WHAT..?

WAIT -- THAT SYMBOL --?!

STILL I *MUST* BE IN THE RIGHT PLACE FOR WHATEVER'S... *NEXT*..?

IT'S *EXACTLY* LIKE THE *AMULET* THE DYING *WOLF-MAN* GAVE ME WHEN HE URGED ME ON THIS *MAD* QUEST.

"DYING *WOLF-MAN*?!" *LISTEN* TO ME --!

IT'S *OFFICIAL*, I'M COMPLETELY *BUG-NUTS* -- I CAN NOW SAY THE MOST INSANE THINGS AS IF I WERE TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER. GOD HELP ME.

UM... WAS YOUR MESSENGER A YOUNG... UM, *HAIRY* GUY..?

HE WAS *LOUPE GAROU*, YES...

THEN I'M SORRY TO TELL YOU THAT HE DIDN'T MAKE IT --

-- HE WAS KILLED IN FRONT OF MY HOUSE BACK IN NEW YORK.

OH *GREAT SPIRIT*, WE THANK YOU FOR DELIVERING THE *ONE* TO US -- AND FOR BLESSING OUR *MESSENGER'S* MISSION!

AH, THE *WELCOME WAGON*.

LATER.

...EDGAR KNEW THE GREAT RISK HE FACED IN FINDING YOU -- STILL HE WILL BE GREATLY MOURNED.

BUT OUR JOY TODAY IS UNBOUNDED -- GL'OOSCAP HAS RETURNED TO US!

GLOOZ --?

GL'OOSCAP -- THAT WOULD BE YOU, ST. GEORGE -- HERE, DRINK.

YOU SHOULD PROBABLY KNOW THAT NONE OF THIS MAKES ANY SENSE TO ME.

WHAT'S IN THE CUP?

SOMETHING TO HELP YOU FIND THE SENSE YOU SEEK.

SOMETHING TO LET YOU SEE DEEP AND SPEAK TO THE LAND.

HMMM -- TASTES LIKE... ROOT BEER?! HOW'S THIS STUFF SUPPOSED TO WORK...

...I MEAN THERE'RE A MILLION THINGS I NEED TO KNOW...

THE DREAMS, THE DRAGON, THE CASTLE, THE MISSING BOY -- WHEN DO I GET THE ANSWERS?

I'M JUST A MEDICINE MAN, FRIEND -- I CAN'T ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS. YOU MUST ASK MANITOU -- THE GREAT SPIRIT -- FOR ILLUMINATION.

MANITOU. RIIIIGHT -- I'LL DO THAT.

WHERE DO I FIND HIM?

MANITOU IS THE GREAT SPIRIT -- HE IS EVERY-WHERE!

HE MADE US, THE PEOPLE, AND ALL THAT TOUCHES US!

I MUST'VE BEEN OUT OF MY MIND TO FOLLOW MY NIGHTMARES!

CAN'T ANY ONE SAY JUST ONE THING THAT MAKES SENSE?!

MANITOU! AHWHEH-OMBIK-LAKOIK-KIROSHA-LAMINNIK-HOH!

??

AHWEH-OMBIK-LAKOIK-KIROSHA-LAMINNIK-HOH!

WHAT THE HELL -- THE NOISE... THE SMOKE -- THAT WEIRD DRINK --?

AHWEH-OMBIK-LAKOIK-KIROSHA-LAMINNIK-HOH!!

EVERY-THING'S GETTING... DISTORTED... HAZY -- MY HEAD...

...FEELS SO...

...HEAVY --

-- SO...?

...HAVE TO FIGHT IT... STAY AWAKE?!

I AM AWAKE -- BUT WHERE IS EVERYONE ELSE?

BUBBLE

GLOOSH

HELLO, GEORGE.

SLUSH

HOLY --!

WELCOME, GEORGE -- YOUR *FAITH* IS ADMIRABLE. IT WILL ALWAYS *SAVE* YOU FROM THE DRAGON.

A-ARE YOU... M-MANITOU..?

LET'S JUST SAY THAT *I* AM ONE OF MANITOU'S... APPOINTED *REPRESENTATIVES.*

YOU'RE AN...*ANGEL?* LIKE IN THE *BIBLE?* BUT YOU SERVE A *NATIVE AMERICAN* DEITY?

DON'T BE SO *PAROCHIAL,* GEORGE. MANITOU. YAHWEH. ALLAH. *GOD.* ALL NAMES FOR THE SAME *CREATOR.*

SO... YOU'RE HERE TO EXPLAIN THE *DREAMS..?*

I... WISH I HAD *TIME*, GEORGE -- I *DO*.

BUT I'M ONLY HERE TO *ANNOUNCE* YOUR *MISSION*. THAT'S MY GIG.

THERE IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING A TIME WHEN TWO VAST FORCES --

-- HELD IN *TENSION* FOR UNTOLD AEONS -- WILL EXPLODE INTO CATACLYSMIC CONFLICT!

IT IS *YOUR* CHARGE TO PROVIDE *BALANCE* -- AND TO *SAFEGUARD* THE *EARTH* HERSELF DURING THIS DESPERATE TIME.

NOT TOO MUCH *PRESSURE*.

GOD NEVER ASKS MORE OF YOU THAN YOU CAN *HANDLE*. KNEEL, PLEASE.

HEAR ME, GEORGE DAVIS -- FOR I SPEAK WITH THE VOICE OF THE *EARTH!* YOU ARE OUR *CHAMPION* IN THIS MOST CRUCIAL TIME -- DO NOT *FAIL* US!

TAKE UP THIS *SACRED QUEST* -- FIGHT FOR YOUR WORLD AS YOU HAVE SO OFTEN IN THE PAST!

RECEIVE THE SIGNS OF YOUR OFFICE...

... THE *ARMOR, SHIELD,* AND *SWORD* OF...

... *SAINT GEORGE,* THE *DRAGON SLAYER!*

FIND *ALEX ELDER*. THAT IS YOUR *FIRST* TASK --

I'M BACK..?

-- WHEN YOU *DO*, MORE WILL BE REVEALED TO YOU.

FIND ALEX ELDER -- LIKE I HAVEN'T BEEN *TRYING* FOR EIGHT MONTHS. STILL, GOD GIVES YOU A JOB, YOU DON'T QUIBBLE..

WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK, MANHATTAN.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT IT WAS EKIMUS WHO MADE ME INTO A VAMPIRE!*

NOT EXACTLY, ALEX. IT WAS ROSE THE PUPPET WHO MADE YOU -- EKKIE JUST KEPT HER FROM PUREEING YOU -- SO YOU'D LIVE ON UNDEAD!

BUT I THOUGHT OLD STONE-FACE WAS TRYING TO HELP ME -- IN HIS OWN TOO-WEIRD FASHION, ANYWAY...

HE WAS, BOBO -- HE FED YOU HIS OWN BLOOD -- AN' MADE YOU INTO A NEW KINDA' BLOOD-SUCKER!

THEY SAY EKIMUS IS THE FATHER OF ALL OF US -- AN' YOU MAINLINED HIS SANGRIA! HE MADE YOU SPECIAL!

HMM, YOU WANT ANSWERS ONLY EKKIE CAN GIVE, I THINK YOU GOTTA GO TO EKKIE!

HE'S COMPLETELY NUTS, BUT REAL SMART -- AND THE ONLY GUY ONNA PLANET WHO'S HOOKED-UP WIT' THE WHOLE SCOOP!

HE ALSO USED ME, LIED TO ME AND BETRAYED ME, JOE... NOW WHERE DO I GET THE ANSWERS I NEED?!

HO-KAY, LES' TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT --

-- WA'S UP WIT' SCARLET?

...

NOTHING... AS FAR AS I KNOW...

ARE YOU BLUSHING, BOBO --?!? VAMPIRES CAN'T BLUSH!

LET IT GO, JOE -- LET'S GET INSIDE, DAWN'LL BE HERE SOON...

SKRECH

*SEE LAST ISSUE FOR THE WHOLE STORY. - Scott

GET HIM!

-- TH' HELL?!

FORGET THE MEXICAN -- WE ONLY WANT THE YOUNG ONE!

WHO ARE -- OOOH!

SSHZ

LIKE THAT, BLOODSUCKER? IT'S A LIVE WIRE FULLA SO MUCH JUICE EVEN YOU CAN GET...

JERRY GARCIA BAND LIVE

ARAAA

... FRIED!

WE'RE ON A HOLY QUEST --

-- ALL OUR WEAPONS ARE BLESSED, HEH!

UNNHH!

YOU LEAVE MY FRIEND ALONE, SCUM!

SNARL

NOT SO FAST, TOOTHY...

YEEOWW!

ZZAAK

GET THE BABY-MONSTER IN THE VAN -- LET'S GO!

TH-THIN' THA'S GON' STOP M-ME? THA'S *N-NOT* G-GONNA STOP ME..

...I REMEMBER HOW MY LEGS WORK AN' YOU *LOCOS* ARE IN B-BIG TROUBLE..

...OH, Y-YEAH -- *SEE* I'M ... UH-*UP!* I'M COMIN' FOR YOU, IT'S GONNA BE..

VRRM

...DAWN...?!

SUN'LL *FRY* ME WORSE THAN THAT *SHOCKER* EVER COULD -- AN' THEN WHAT *GOOD* AM I TO ALEX?!

DON'T WORRY, BOBO -- I *WILL* GET YOU *FREE!*

SKREECH

RELAX, ELDER -- EVEN YOU CAN'T GET *FREE* FROM *THAT RIG*, IT'S --

RAHHR

SNACKT

-- CRAP!

HOLD HI --

SLSH

AHH!

SNIK

HOLD THAT DAMNED MONGREL STILL --!

GRAK

DON'T FIGHT THEM, ALEX... AND THINGS WILL GO SO MUCH EASIER...

WHO...?

-- SCARLET?!

RELAX, MON AMI -- AS HARD AS IT MAY BE TO BELIEVE, THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.

THIS IS THE RIGHT BLOODSUCKER, THINBAULT?

YES. ALEX ELDER.

WH-WHY--? OOOOO...

THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU REPORT HIS FEROCITY?!

NO ONE TOLD ME THIS WAS A HUNT, ERIC.

YOU TREATED HIM AS AN ANIMAL, THAT IS HOW HE RESPONDED -- NATURELLEMENT.

IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT ALEX IS IMPORTANT TO OUR LEADERS. THAT HE WAS TO BE CONSIDERED A PROTECTED GUEST.

BUT FOR A PETIT SAUSISSE LIKE YOU, EVERY ENCOUNTER IS ABOUT CONQUEST -- NON?

DAMN IT!

SOMETHING HUGE IS BIRTHING OUT THERE -- AND I KNOW NOTHING!

I AM FAR TOO IMPORTANT FOR HER TO KEEP ME IN THE DARK LIKE THIS!

YOU HAVE MAIL!

new message

KLIK

IS SHE GETTING SENILE AFTER ALL THESE MILLENNIA?!

THE BOY IS THE ONE

PROTECT HIM AND HIS FAMILY

KEEP HIM AWAY FROM THE GRIGORI

-L

THIS... GAME-PLAYING IS A WASTE OF MY TIME AND TALENT -- AND WILL ACCOMPLISH NOTHING!

SLAM

BUT I CAN SERVE BOTH MY MISTRESS AND MY OWN ENDS WITH THE BLACK ARTS -- THOUGH, DEEP IN HER PREHISTORIC HEART, SHE DESPISES MAGIC!

TIME NOW FOR THE WATCHDOGS TO AWAKE...

"... AND ATTACK!"

KRASH

WH-WHERE..?

IN A... CAGE?!

AN ELECTRIFIED CAGE?!

WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON HERE?!

YOU ARE IN CARE OF THE *KNIGHTS TEMPLAR*, VAMPIRE! WHERE YOU WILL STAY UNTIL I SAY OTHERWISE!

I AM BARNEBEAU D'ORENSE -- *MASTER OF THE TEMPLE*. DIRECT DESCENDANT OF SAINT BERNARD, HIMSELF!

A BIG SLOPPY *DOG* IS YOUR GREAT-GRANDPA -- AND YOU'RE *PROUD* OF IT?

TRES AMUSANT.

CONSIDER THE IRONY, THOUGH -- IT IS *YOU* WHO ARE CHAINED LIKE A *HOUND! MY* HOUND!

SIR... IS ALL OF THIS... *NECESSARY* --?

IT IS BEYOND NECESSARY, MY DEAR -- WE ARE KNIGHTS OF THE *TRUE CROSS*, IT IS OUR *DUTY* TO KEEP AND *PROTECT* THE BOY UNTIL HIS MOMENT ARRIVES!

DO I DETECT A TONE OF *SYMPATHY*, SCARLET THINBAULT?

NON, *MAITRE* -- IT IS JUST... *CURIOSITE*...

LET THAT BE ALL IT IS, YOU LITTLE FOOL! WE SHARE A SACRED CHARGE, DO NOT FORGET --!

-- TO EXTERMINATE THE HELLISH VERMIN WHO PREY ON THE CHILDREN OF GOD!

CERTAINEMENT, MAITRE.

SCARLET MERELY WISHES TO UNDERSTAND THIS CURRENT QUEST, BARNEBEAU -- AS DO I.

I'M NOT A MONSTER! TELL THEM, SCARLET -- PLEASE!

YOU ALL KNOW OUR QUEST AS WELL AS I, DUMAS -- TO ANNIHILATE MONSTERS LIKE THIS!

THIS ONE MAY BE USEFUL TO THAT END, SO HE LIVES -- FOR NOW! BUT ONLY BY MY SUFFERANCE!

TELL THEMMM!

ENOUGH! I HAVE OTHER CONCERNS -- SILENCE HIM IMMEDIATELY!

ADIEU... DOG.

CALM YOURSELF, ALEX -- THEY WILL NOT KILL YOU, THEY NEED YOU...!

ZZRAK

YAAGH!

MOVE ON, THIMBAULT -- I HAVE A SCORE TO SETTLE WITH THIS BASTARD...

...AN EYE FOR AN EYE...

...PLEASED WITH YOUNG SCARLET'S WORK, OF COURSE, BUT IT IS TIME TO FIND ANOTHER PLACE FOR HER.

I PROPOSE TO TRANSFER HER BACK TO RHEIMS -- TO THE CONVENT OF ST. MARTHA -- TO TAKE HER PLACE AS A MOTHER OF NEW WARRIORS!

TO ACT AS BREED MARE --?! BUT, MAITRE, SHE IS STILL SO YOUNG -- STILL VITAL TO THE RED HOOD CAUSE!

I WILL NOT BE QUESTIONED! AND MIND, DUMAS, TO RETIRE TO MATERNAL SERVICE IS CONSIDERED AN HONOR!

BUT SCARLET KNOWS THIS AREA BETTER THAN ANY OF US --!

ENOUGH -- SHE GOES BACK TO FRANCE!

BUT, SIR, I CAN STILL SERVE HERE --!

IF I ALLOW YOU THIS ONE FINAL MISSION, SCARLET --

THOU SHALT SUFFER NOT A WITCH TO LIVE! -- THEY WILL ALL DIE!

WE CANNOT AFFORD DISTRACTION -- A CONFLAGRATION MAY BE IN THE OFFING -- IT IS THE TEMPLAR'S CHARGE TO CONTAIN, OR AVERT IT IF POSSIBLE...

...REGARDLESS, WE WILL CLEANSE THE LAND OF THE DEMONIC SCUM WHO FOMENT THIS POTENTIAL APOCALYPSE!

-- UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WILL BE A PURIFICATION -- NEW YORK WILL BE WIPED CLEAN!

BUT, MAITRE, NOT ALL DARKLINGS ARE...

BON JOUR, SCARLET X...

THE NEXT NIGHT...

HOW MANY SUNSETS HAVE I WITNESSED IN MY INTERMINABLE, IMMORTAL EXISTENCE? TOO MANY.

TO SEE EVEN ONE SUNRISE, HOWEVER, WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT PLEASURE...

...BUT DAY IS EVER DENIED TO WE DWELLERS OF DARKNESS...

I HATE TO EVEN CONSIDER IT, BUT ALEX ELDER'S PRESENCE MADE THE LONG NIGHTS MORE BEARABLE..

...BUT NOW I HAVE HURRIED HIM INTO DEPARTING AND I MISS THE DENIALS, THE TANTRUMS... THE LAUGHTER...

...PERHAPS MOST OF ALL, THE INNOCENCE.

IT IS MY TASK -- MY BOUNDEN DUTY -- TO SHEPHERD THE YOUNG ELDER THROUGH THIS COMING TIME OF REVELATION -- I DID NOT NEED TO CARE ABOUT HIM.

BUT I DO.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY OTHER "CHOSEN ONES" BEFORE ALEX --ALL OF THEM, ULTIMATELY, UNWORTHY FAILURES...

...BUT THE BOY'S INNATE GOODNESS MAKES HIM MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY OF THEM. AND THE ENORMITY OF HIS COMING CHALLENGE WILL REQUIRE EVERY OUNCE OF THAT POWER.

THE STORM GATHERS, THE TIME APPROACHES... AND I HAVE DRIVEN THE BOY AWAY SOMEWHE --

SLAM

EKIMUS! EKIMUS! EKIMUS!

JUST BEFORE DAWN, SOME MALOS SNATCHED ALEX!

WHO DID THIS?!

KNIGHTS, MAN -- LE'S GO SAVE 'IM!

KNIGHTS? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

GUYS IN SHINING ARMOR!

KNIGHTFALL

NOW CAN WE GET GOIN'? ALEX NEEDS US...

...HEY?! -- WHA'S THIS, NOW?

DARK SORCERY!

SKREEAAHH!

THINK I SEE A RESEMBLANCE -- THESE RELATIVES O' YOURS, EKKIE?

I HAVEN'T A CLUE WHAT THEY ARE -- LOOK OUT!

RAHRR!

BUT I DO NOT NEED TO UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS...

...I NEED ONLY UNDERSTAND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS CHURCH --

-- THIS BALCONY SUPPORT PILLAR IS THE MAIN LOAD-BEARER, FOR INSTANCE.

SKRAK

SWADOOM

SPRAAK

IT ALL FALL DOWN. COOL.

HAH! THIS POOR ROCK-HEAD'S JUS' GOIN' TO PIECES!

SHEE--?

DON'T GET COCKY -- THEY WON'T BE BEATEN THIS EASILY!

HEHEHE

HOLD DEMONS -- YOUR EVIL SHAN'T DESECRATE THIS SACRED SPACE ANY FURTHER!

MY BLADE IS BLESSED BY *HEAVEN* ITSELF -- AND THE LIKES OF *THESE* WILL NOT STAND AGAINST ITS POWER!

SHRAK

SKREEGAAH!

GIT ALONG LIL DOGGIE --!

YEE HAH!!

SKRUNCH

SKRUNCH

THIS BRONC HAS...

...BUSTED!

THE DEVIL-SPAWN ARE *DUST!* THE CONFLICT IS FINISHED...

NOT BY ANY MEASURE...

FWUNG

...TELL ME WHAT YOU AND YOUR *ARMORED* LACKEYS DID WITH ALEX ELDER!

I...? I HAVE *NO* IDEA WHAT YOU MEAN...!

NO-NO-*NO!*

THIS GUY *WASN'T* ONE OF 'EM! TH' *MATONS* TOOK ALEX WORE *RED* CROSSES!

RED CROSSES...?

THE *TEMPLARS* ARE IN NEW YORK.

FWOOSH

¿DONDE --?

WHERE IS THE GRIGORI GOING?

DOES HE KNOW WHERE ALEX ELDER IS?

WHY'N'CHOO ASK 'IM? I DON'T KNOW YOU FROM NOBODY!

AN' FLYIN' HORSE, MAGIC SWORD, OR NO -- I DON'T GOT ANY REASON TO TRUST YOU -- ADIOS!

JIMMY'S PLACE

FREAKIN' BUFONS ARGUIN' AND FUSSIN -- AN' NO ONE SAVIN' ALEX! IF I GOTTA DO IT MYSELF, I WILL...

I ASKED POLITELY: WHERE IS ALEX ELDER?

HEY--?!

PUT ME -- WHOA -- DOWNN--!

PERHAPS WE CAN FIND HIM TOGETHER!

SETTLE DOWN, FANG BOY -- YOU'RE TOO WEAK TO BUST LOOSE THIS TIME!

FACE IT, YOU BELONG TO US FOREVER --!

KRAAHH

WHOOO -- YOU'RE REALLY WOLFING OUT, ARENT YOU? THEY TOLD ME THIS WOULD HAPPEN WHEN YOU GOT GOOD'N HUNGRY...

...WELL, CHEW ON THIS -- ALL SIZZLE, NO STEAK -- HA-HA-HA!

ZRAKK

IMMORTALITY'S A BITCH, ISN'T IT, VAMPIRE?

AS BAD AS THIS HURTS, IT ISN'T GONNA KILL YOU -- SO I CAN KEEP BRINGING THE PAIN, AND YOU GOTTA LIVE THROUGH EVERY LAST DROP OF IT!

AAARGH

AND IT'S GONNA GET SO MUCH WORSE, BOYO, I PROMISE YOU THAT.

YOU'RE GONNA BE PRAYING TO DIE --

-- BUT YOU WON'T!

HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH

SLAM

UNNN -- O --

HUUFF--!

CAN'T... BREAK... IT...

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS TO ME?! IF I DON'T *FEED* SOON, I'LL *DIE* -- NO MATTER WHAT THAT SICK BASTARD THINKS!

COMPARED TO *THIS*... THAT WOULDN'T BE SO... *BAD*...

OH, ALEX, YOU WERE ALWAYS SO *STRONG*... DON'T GIVE UP NOW...

?!

... EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE JUST *FINE*... I *PROMISE*!

JULIE...? BUT YOU'RE... *DEAD*?!

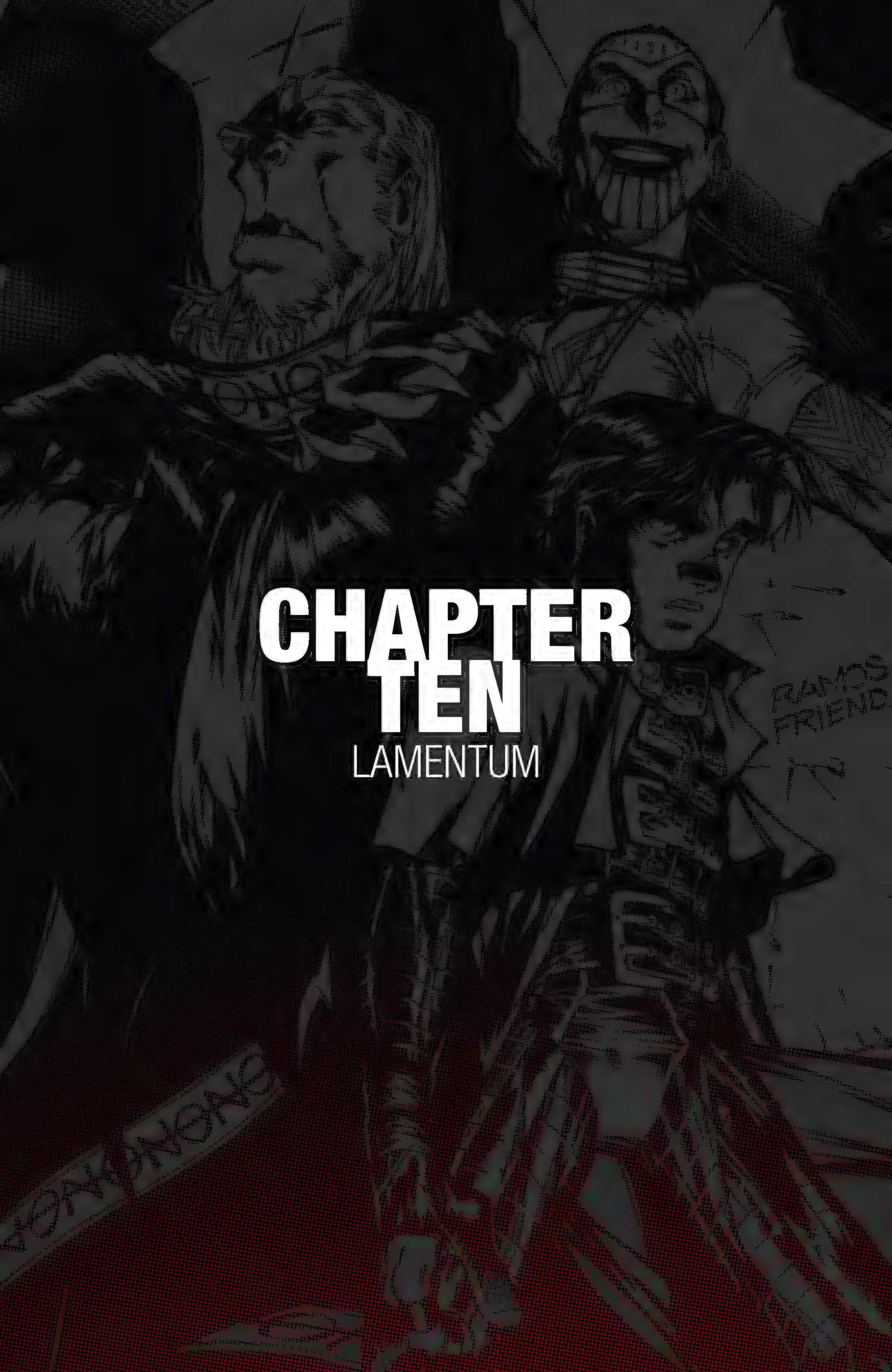
AND WHAT REMAINS OF ALEX ELDER'S SANITY SHATTERS TO SMALL SPARKLING SHARDS...

HEAR ME
GREEN DAM -
FOR I SPEAK WITH
THE VOICE OF THE
MEN YOU PEG OUT
CHAINED IN THE
MOST CRUEL
TIME - DO NOT
FAIL US!

TAKE UP
THE SACRED
QUEST - FIGHT
FOR YOUR SOUL
OFTEN IN THE
DARK

CLIMB
THE RAG
OF YOUR
OFFICE

THE
ARMOR
SHIELD
AND
SWORD


CHAPTER
TEN
LAMENTUM

LOWER MANHATTAN. 2:26 AM.

LEW NOVOTNY HAS SOLD NEWSPAPERS, CIGARS AND CANDY ON THIS CORNER FOR BETTER THAN FORTY YEARS.

AND IN ALL THOSE YEARS, HE HAS NEVER HEADED HOME ANY EARLIER THAN THIS. MANY OF HIS NEIGHBORS TELL HIM THAT THIS IS DANGEROUS...

...BUT HELL, NEW YORK HAS ALWAYS BEEN DANGEROUS. DIDN'T JOHNNY CARSON MAKE MUGGING JOKES THIRTY YEARS AGO? THE SAME JOKES THAT GAP-TOOTHED GUY MAKES TODAY?

BUT NOW HIS NEIGHBORS SAY, THE PROBLEM IS MONSTERS -- OF ALL THINGS -- CREEPY-CRAWLIES STRAIGHT OUT OF GRANDMA HULDA'S FOLK- TALES.

BUT IF IT'S NOT MONSTERS, IT'S GANGS, JUNKIES, CRAZIES... WHATEVER. NEW YORK'S GOT IT ALL -- AND LEW ISN'T GOING TO START BEING INTIMATED BY HIS CITY NOW!

LEW WAS BORN ON THESE STREETS SEVENTY-TWO YEARS AGO...

...AND HE PLANS ON DYING HERE TOO -- BUT NOT TOO SOON, THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

...STILL, THE STREETS ARE SO EERILY QUIET TONIGHT --

-- HE WONDERS IS THIS MONSTER TALK IS MAYBE... TRUE.

BUT... NO -- THE STORIES ARE JUST TOO TOO. VAMPIRES FIGHTING KNIGHTS IN SHINING ARMOR?! MYSTERIOUS MEN IN BLACK SWOOPING DOWN TO KIDNAP HELPLESS CITIZENS?!

PLEASE. THAT KIND OF FOOLISHNESS IS THE STUFF OF THE SATURDAY SERIALS HE LOVED AS A CHILD -- RIP- ROARING FUN, BUT NONSENSE ALL THE SAME...

...AND NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF IN THE REAL WORLD.

RAARGHRGH!

LEW NOVOTNY HAS NO TIME FOR SHOCK OR FEAR, BUT HE DOES FEEL THE FAINTEST GLIMMERINGS OF ANNOYANCE.

HE HATES BEING WRONG.

SKREECHH

HEY, BLOOD-SUCKER--!

UHHH--?!

HUP.

HUP.

HUP.

TEMPLARS -- SECURE THE DARKLING!

DO NOT BOTHER STRUGGLING, MON AMI, THEY KNOW HOW TO CONTAIN YOUR KIND...

SNARRL

...WHICH WILL LEAVE HIM TO FATHER LEVESQUE'S TENDER MERCIES.

INDEED WE DO, SCARLET X -- STARTING WITH SOLID SILVER SHACKLES...

...NO VAMPIRE CAN BREAK FREE OF THESE BEAUTIES...

IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII, ET SPIRITUS SANCTI...

SPLISH

THE VAMPIRE *NICKED* THE OLD MAN SLIGHTLY, ERIK -- WILL THAT *AFFECT* HIM?

WHY TAKE *CHANCES*...?

'SCUSE ME, BUT COULD SOM'BY *HELP* ME HERE?!

HELL-OO -- I'M *BLEEDIN'* LIKE A STUCK *PIG* HERE!

NOT *HARDLY*, OLD MAN -- NOT *YET* ANYWAY.

OH, HOLY *JEE--!*

WHI

IT IS LIKELY THAT LEW NOVOTNY NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM --

-- THE KNIFE PIERCED HIS HEART AND DEATH WAS INSTANTANEOUS. BUT WHILE WE CAN KNOW THE *HOW* OF IT, THE *WHY* REMAINS A MYSTERY...

...THE LATEST IN AN ESCALATING CHAIN OF GRISLY EVENTS -- A RASH OF VIOLENT CRIME AND MURDER THAT HAS GRABBED THE BIG APPLE IN AN ICY GRIP OF DOOM!

CAN THE RUMORS OF VAMPIRES AND WEREVOLVES BE TRUE? IT SEEMS UNBELIEVABLE, BUT THE MYSTERIES DEEPEN -- AND THE DEATH COUNT MOUNTS.

TANZY MACADO, WORLD-WIDE CABLE NEWS, MANHATTAN.

KLIK

FFSSRRHHH

ALEX ELDER, RELUCTANT VAMPIRE.
AHHROOOOOHH!
CAPTIVE OF THE VENGEFUL KNIGHTS TEMPLAR, HE HAS BEEN LOCKED UP FOR... HOW LONG -- DAYS, A WEEK -- LONGER? HE NO LONGER KNOWS...
...ALL HE DOES KNOW FOR CERTAIN IS THAT HE'S DYING BY INCHES.
DEPRIVED OF THE BLOOD HIS KIND NEEDS FOR SUSTENANCE, ALEX IS FALLING DEEPER INTO HIS ANIMALISTIC INSTINCTS...
...LOSING HIS MIND, EVEN AS HIS LIFE SLIPS AWAY.
OH, NOW SWEETIE... IT CAN'T BE THAT BAD...
HOW ELSE TO EXPLAIN THAT HIS ONLY SYMPATHETIC COMPANY IS JULIE RYDER -- WHO'S BEEN DEAD FOR THREE MONTHS!
N-NUH! D-DON'T... SEE ME THIS WAY -- PLEASE!
OH, ALEX... YOU'VE NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF -- YOU'RE DOING THE BEST YOU CAN...
...BESIDES, I'M NOT HERE TO JUDGE YOU, I'M HERE TO HELP YOU.
TH-THEN O-O-OPEN THE CAGE... UH... DOOR!
I'M SORRY, ALEX... I CAN'T. ALL I CAN DO IS ENCOURAGE YOU.
THAT'S NOT GONNA FEED ME -- AND IF I DON'T FEED SOON, I'M DEAD!
DON'T GIVE UP, ALEX, STAY STRONG --
-- I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!
NO-O-O! I CAN'T -- I'M DYING!
AND NOW I'M ARGUING WITH A MIRAGE...

OH, ALEX... IS THAT ALL I AM TO YOU...?

I-I DON'T KNOW, JULIE -- I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T KNOW *ANYTHING* ANY MORE...!

WELL, I BELIEVE IN *YOU*, ALEX -- WITH ALL MY HEART. AND I'M GOING TO GO ON *BELIEVING!*

IT'S ALL GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, I KNOW IT! IT *HAS* TO -- YOU'RE THE *CHOSEN ONE!* THERE ARE *BIG PLANS* FOR YOU ...!

HAVE YOU BEEN DATING *LONG?*

"... PLANS THAT INCLUDE TONITE'S *SILVER CUP AWARDS* BANQUET AND *DANCING* AT LE CIRQUE!

"ON *SENATOR VAN FLEET'S ARM* THIS EVENING IS GORGEOUS *TIFFANY SUE DAMIEN*, STAR OF TV'S *'BEVERLY HILLS BEACH'!*"

SENATOR --! ARE YOU AND MISS DAMIEN AN *ITEM* NOW SIR?

ARE THERE WEDDING BELLS IN THE FUTURE?!

ARE YOU GOING INTO *POLITICS*, MISS DAMIEN?

MS. DAMIEN AND I ARE JUST *FRIENDS.*

WE HAPPEN TO SHARE AN INTEREST IN THE CAUSE THE SILVER CUP AWARD REPRESENTS -- UNDERPRIVILEGED REPUBLICAN YOUTH.

WERE I TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT ANYONE, THOUGH, THE DELECTABLE MS. DAMIEN WOULD NOT BE FAR FROM MY THOUGHTS. GOOD EVENING EVERYONE.

AH, VICTOR.. HOW NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

AZZO.

I'D HEARD YOU WERE *DEAD* IN BELGRADE... OR WAS IT *BERLIN?*

IT WAS *BOTH,* ACTUALLY. BUT YOU KNOW HOW *PERMANENT* THAT IS IN OUR *BUSINESS.*

SHE WANTS TO SEE YOU, VICTOR OLD BOY...

WONDERFUL.

CHANGE OF PLANS, KURT -- WE HAVE A *NEW* DESTINATION...

SORRY TIFF, REALLY, BUT I'VE GOT TO DASH -- THIS IS *NATIONAL SECURITY!*

MISS DAMIEN --? HAVE YOU AND THE SENATOR *BROKEN UP?*

IS THE SENATOR *GAY?*

VRRMM

MISS DAMIEN...?

THERE HE *GOES!* AREN'T WE GOING TO *FOLLOW* HIM?!

EKIMUS... ARE YOU LISTENING --?!

I HEAR YOU, JOSEPH... HOW COULD I NOT?

WE ARE NOT FOLLOWING VAN FLEET, BECAUSE HE IS *NOT* GOING TO WHERE ALEX IS BEING *KEPT*. *THAT* IS SOMEWHERE ELSE ENTIRELY.

YOU MEAN YOU *KNOW* WHERE ALEX IS, AND WE'RE CHILLIN' OUR BUTTS ON THIS *ROOF*?! W'AS UP WI' *THAT*?!

I DO KNOW. I AM JUST KEEPING TRACK OF ALL THE *PLAYERS* -- ON *ALL SIDES*.

I GO TO ALEX, NOW -- ON MY OWN.

WHA --?! YOU DITCHIN' ME AFTER ALL THE *HELP* I BEEN, MAN?!

I TRACKED DOWN *SOURCES*...

...LEANED ON *SNITCHES*... PAID OFF STREET-PEOPLE!

DID THE WHOLE BATMAN TRIP... NONE OF WHICH ACTUALLY *HELPED*, I'LL GRANT'CHA -- BUT I *TRIED*!

WHILE *YOU* SAT ON YOUR STONY BUTT AND ACTED ALL *COSMIC*.

DON'T GET ME *WRONG* -- THAT *WAS* IMPRESSIVE -- GOTTA TEACH ME THAT *VOO-DOO* SOMEDAY...! HUH-HUH-HUH --?!

-- C'MON, JEFE, TAKE ME WIT'CHOO! LET ME HELP *SAVE* MY *FRIEND*!

YOU LETTIN' THAT *SAINT JORGE* GUY GO, AIN'T IT? I GOT MORE RIGHT THAN FREAKY BROTHER --! *PLEASE*!

SIGH

THIS IS ONE OF *THEIR* HANG-OUTS -- ***CLUB SPIKE.*** MECCA FOR THE CHAINS AND LEATHER CROWD.

ESS AND *EMM*, EH?

KINKY.

OUI. AND *THERE* THEY ARE NOW.

THEY CALL THEMSELVES THE ***HOOTENANNIES***, OF ALL THINGS -- VAMPIRE SLUTS WHO PREY ON THE ROUGH-TRADE CLUB SCENE...

XXX MOVIES

...LURING THE UNSUSPECTING OFF FOR A ***WILDER*** TIME THAN EXPECTED.

SO, DO WE TAIL THEM WHEN THEY LEAVE AND TAKE THEM ON THEIR OWN TURF?

EHH... NO. I'M ORDERING SQUAD 8 IN THROUGH THE BACK DOOR -- ***WE'LL*** RAPPEL DOWN THE BUILDING FOR A ***FRONTAL ASSAULT...***

NON! THERE ARE ***CIVILIANS*** IN THERE -- WE CAN'T PUT ***THEM*** IN ***HARM'S WAY --!***

WE MAKE OMELETTES, WE GOTTA BREAK ***EGGS.*** 'SIDES, THOSE FREAKS ***LIKE PAIN*** -- HEH...

...THIS IS ***WAR,*** GIRLIE -- AND WE'RE SANCTIONED FOR ***TOTAL PURIFICATION!***

YOU'RE ON ***THIN ICE*** AS IT IS -- ***DON'T*** EVER QUESTION MY ORDERS AGAIN!

BÂTARD.

...LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT...

DANNY LANCER Show

...YOU'RE ALL ...VAMPIRES?!

ISN'T IT DANGEROUS TO COME ON TV AND ADMIT THAT NOW-A-DAYS?

WHAT WITH SHINING KNIGHTS KILLING YOUR KIND --?

IT'S BLATANT ANTI-DARKLING TERRORISM, DANNY -- AND THE CITY SHOULD BE PROTECTING US!

AND... MY BOYFRIEND'S THE VAMPIRE -- I'M A WEREWOLF.

"I dated a vampire!"

UM... RIGHT... SORRY, LORNA. SO, WHY D'YOU SUPPOSE THIS... TERRORISM IS GOING ON?

PREJUDICE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE, DANNY -- THEY HATE US 'CAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT...

...WE JUST WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE TO LEAD OUR NIGHT-LIVES IN PEACE.

DANNY LANCER Show

DEATH TO CREATURES OF THE NIGHT!

DANNY LANCER

DIE, HELL-SPAWN!

YEEOW!!

YOU IDIOT, I'M A WEREWOLF -- WOODEN STAKES ARE FOR VAMPIRES!

WE'VE... UH... GOT A COMMERCIAL -- PLEASE, GOD -- WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK..!

THERE NOW, YOU'VE... FED A BIT. DO YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, SWEETIE?

OH... SU-U-U-URE -- --RATS, THE BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS!

HELPS BUILD STRONG VAMPIRES TWELVE WAYS --!

HEE-HEE-HEE...

HEE-OOH...

GO 'WAY, JULIE -- I'M LOSING MY MIND --!

-- AND MY HUMANITY! I DON'T WAN' YOU TO S-SEE ME LIKE THIS!

I SEE ONLY THE BOY I LOVE! I'LL BE WITH YOU, ALWAYS!

THAT'S ALL THAT'S KEEPING ME TOGETHER!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, THOUGH, I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEA --

HUSH, ALEX -- I'M HERE. THAT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS.

BUT, STILL, IF I HADN'T GONE AFTER THE JELLY-BATS...

...MAYBE ROSE WOULD'VE LET YOU LIVE --

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON, ALEX -- EVERYTHING. THIS WAS ALL MEANT TO BE... HONEST.

DON'T BE -- IT'S GOING TO WORK OUT WONDERFULLY! WAIT AND SEE...

I-I'M SO SORRY...

DULAC CASTLE...

... TRANSPORTED STONE BY MASSIVE STONE FROM BRITAIN TO THE SHORES OF THE HUDSON RIVER BY STEEL TYCOON, JACOB FREEMANTLE.

IT WAS THE 1890s, AND MEN LIKE FREEMANTLE WERE AS CLOSE AS AMERICA HAD TO ROYALTY, SO NO ONE IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY WAS GOING TO TELL HIM, "NO."

TODAY THE CASTLE IS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS. THEY DON'T HEAR NO VERY OFTEN, EITHER.

THE PURIFICATION PROCEEDS WELL --

-- SOON NEW BABYLON WILL BE PURGED, AND THE MILLENNIUM WILL BEGIN FREE OF HELL'S MINIONS!

HAIL THE CONQUERING HEROES, BOYS! WE'RE BACK -- WITH TROPHIES!

SOME OF 'EM ARE EVEN STILL ALIVE!

BUT A BUNCH MORE OF 'EM JUST LOST THEIR HEADS!

YEAH -- HEH-HEH-HEEH...

YAAAA!

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SUCCESS, MY KNIGHTS.

THANK YOU, MASTER D'ORENSE -- M'LADY SCARLET LED US TO MANY TEEMING DARKLING NESTS!

THOUGH IT SEEMS SHE HASN'T THE STOMACH FOR DOING THINGS THE TEMPLAR WAY.

THEN IT IS BEST THAT I SEND HER BACK TO FRANCE, EH --?

SINCE THE TEMPLAR WAY IS THE ONLY WAY!

WHAT D'YE SAY FOR YOURSELF, SCARLET X?!

IS THE TEMPLAR'S WAY TO SLAUGHTER *INNOCENT* HUMANS IN THE PURSUIT OF *EVIL*, LORD D'ORENSE...?

NO ONE IS *INNOCENT* IN A *WAR* -- IF THESE WANTED TO SURVIVE, THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE TRAFFICKED WITH *MONSTERS!*

YOU *ARE* GETTING *TOO SOFT*, THINBAULT. I'D THOUGHT YOU A *WARRIOR* -- NOT A MEWING *WHELP!*

I AM *STILL* A WARRIOR, *SEIGNEUR* -- WHEN THE CAUSE IS *JUST.*

YOU ARE RETURNING TO FRANCE, SCARLET X -- *TONIGHT!*

IF YOU ARE *LUCKY*, I WILL LET YOU SERVE YOUR TIME AS A *BREEDING SLUT* FOR THE *LESSER* KNIGHTS!

BEGONE!

STRIP HER OF HER *WEAPONS*, ERIK -- SHE NO LONGER *DESERVES* THEM!

BAD MOVE, RED -- WAY WE GOT THE CREEPS ON THE RUN, THERE'S GONNA BE LOTS OF *GLORY* TO GO 'ROUND.

SOME OF IT COULD'A BEEN *YOURS.*

NON. MY STOMACH COULD NOT ABIDE IT...

"...AND PERHAPS THE DARKLINGS ARE NOT AS BEATEN AS YOU BELIEVE --?"

WHERE IS ALEX ELDER?

SACRÉ! IS THE KING-DEMON! KILL HIM-- PROTECT THE CHÂTEAU!

SMASH

SPARE YOURSELVES -- TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW.

LISSEN TO 'IM, YOU IDIOTAS -- YOU AIN'T GONNA BEAT US!

GIVE ME BACK MY FRIEND!

SKULL

WHERE?

YAAAHHH!!

GOOD LORD --! B-BACK-UP! WE NEED BACK-UP -- NOW!

SCARLET?! YOU'RE WITH THESE MALOS?!

NO LONGER. I HAVE BEEN -- WHAT IS IT? -- FIRED.

WELL... BEFORE THEY PINK-SLIPPED YOU, DID YOU *SEE* WHERE THEY PUT ALEX?

I DID, IT IS -- *JOSEPH*, LOOK *OUT!*

FOR WHA --

MÉRE DE DIEU!

TAKE *THIS*, BLOOD-SUCKER!

OOKAY --

OOW

BUT YOU HAFTA TAKE -- *THIS!*

SSGLLSSH

JOC --?

M'OKAY, IT'S NOT A *WOODEN STAKE* -- I'LL HEAL...

...SLOWLY... AND PAINFULLY. BUT, ALEX --?

I WILL GO TO HIM -- *YOU* GO REST AND HEAL!

WHERE IS ALEX ELDER?!!

SHOCKED

SKRAKAAAK

THE BEAST'S RAGE DESTROYS US -- LET US KILL HIM FIRST!

AND WE MUST NOT LET HIM HAVE THE BOY! CHAAAARRRGE HIM!

YAAAHHH!!

FOOLS.

BLOOOOOD

DESTIN --!

AHHH!

YAHAH!

SKRIISSH

--AAAHH!

AGAIN, TEMPLE MASTER -- I WANT THE BOY. NOW.

UHH... UHH... UUH...?

MY... LORD -- THE CARNAGE...

...AND WHAT IS THIS -- -- THE TEMPLE MASTER'S SHIELD --?

THE ARCHANGEL GABRIELLE -- MY ANGEL--?!

IF THAT KNIGHT IS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF MY *PATRON*, THEN HE IS UNDER *MINE* AS WELL!

UNHAND HIM, GRIGORI!

YOU ARE MISTAKEN...

... THE TEMPLAR USES THAT SHIELD-ICON WITH NO BELIEF WHATEVER IN *ANGELS* -- OR *DIVINE* PROTECTION!

NOW STAY *BACK*--

FLASH

YOUR *SORCERY*...

... HAS NO EFFECT ON ONE WHO *DOES* BELIEVE IN HEAVENLY PRESERVATION...!

... AND I HAVE BEEN *ANOINTED* WITH EVEN MORE *SACRED* POWER!

NO--

YOU FOOL, I--

UNNFF!

THOOP

MY HEAVEN-SENT SWORD CAN CUT EVEN YOU!

YAAARGH!

SSLSHH

UNN!

I... REGRET THIS VIOLENCE, I DO -- BUT I MUST STAND WITH THE TEMPLARS!

MON DIEU, CAN IT BE --?

FWAAMP

MEN, THE DAY IS OURS, OUR SAVIOR IS COME --

-- SAINT GEORGE, THE DRAGON SLAYER OF HOLY LEGEND!

"LET THE DEVIL'S OWN QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

-- THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT, DARKLING!

SMZAK

AHHH

SHZAK

HANG ON, ALEX -- DON'T LET THE ANIMAL LOOSE...

AHHHH

I CAN'T... HELP IT... JULIE...

...S-S-SO HUNGRY... CAN'T HANG ON...!

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO, YOURSELF -- OR YOUR HELLISH MASTER --?

I MUST GO NOW, SWEET ALEX...

...YOUR DESTINY -- A LONG DIFFICULT JOURNEY -- AWAITS!

NO! JULIE,

NOOO!

I MUST, BUT REMEMBER -- ALL YOUR TRAVAIL IS ULTIMATELY FOR THE GREATEST GOOD...

...AND NEVER FORGET THAT I LOVE YOU ALWAYS -- GOOD-BYE, ALEX...

...YOUR RESCUE IS AT HANNN...

ALEX, I AM HERE -- HOLD ON --!

TOOM

YOUR CRUELTY IS AT END, KNIGHT!

UKK-K-K--!

WHII

...BLOOD...?

-- HEY, WE'RE BACK! IT'S THE BIG NIGHT-TIME SHOW...

...AND IT'S TIME FOR OUR MOST DEMANDED FEATURE: THE NIGHT-TIME COUNTDOWN TO HILARITY!

THOUGH I BELIEVE THEY DEMANDED THAT WE STOP -- HEH-HEH...

...ANY-HOO, TONIGHT'S COUNTDOWN TOPIC IS:"HOW DO YOU TELL THAT VAMPIRES REALLY EXIST!"

AND, HERE IN TH' BIG APPLE, YOU KNOW YOU'RE GONNA SEE PLENTY OF UNDEAD -- IF, LIKE ME, YOU FREQUENT THE TOWN'S FINER STRIP CLUBS, THAT IS!

NUMBER TEN: JOEY RAMONE KNOCKED OVER A BLOOD BANK!

NUMBER NINE: GRANDPA MUNSTER IS RUNNING FOR MAYOR -- AND HE'S GOT MY VOTE -- HEH-HEEH...

I'VE BROUGHT YOUR LAP-DOG, MISTRESS...

NUMBER FIVE: THE SPICE GIRLS REALLY BITE! DOES THAT COUNT --?

-- NUMBER TWO: HANSON SUCKS -- AND, HOO-BOY, THERE'S YER PROOF, RIGHT THERE!

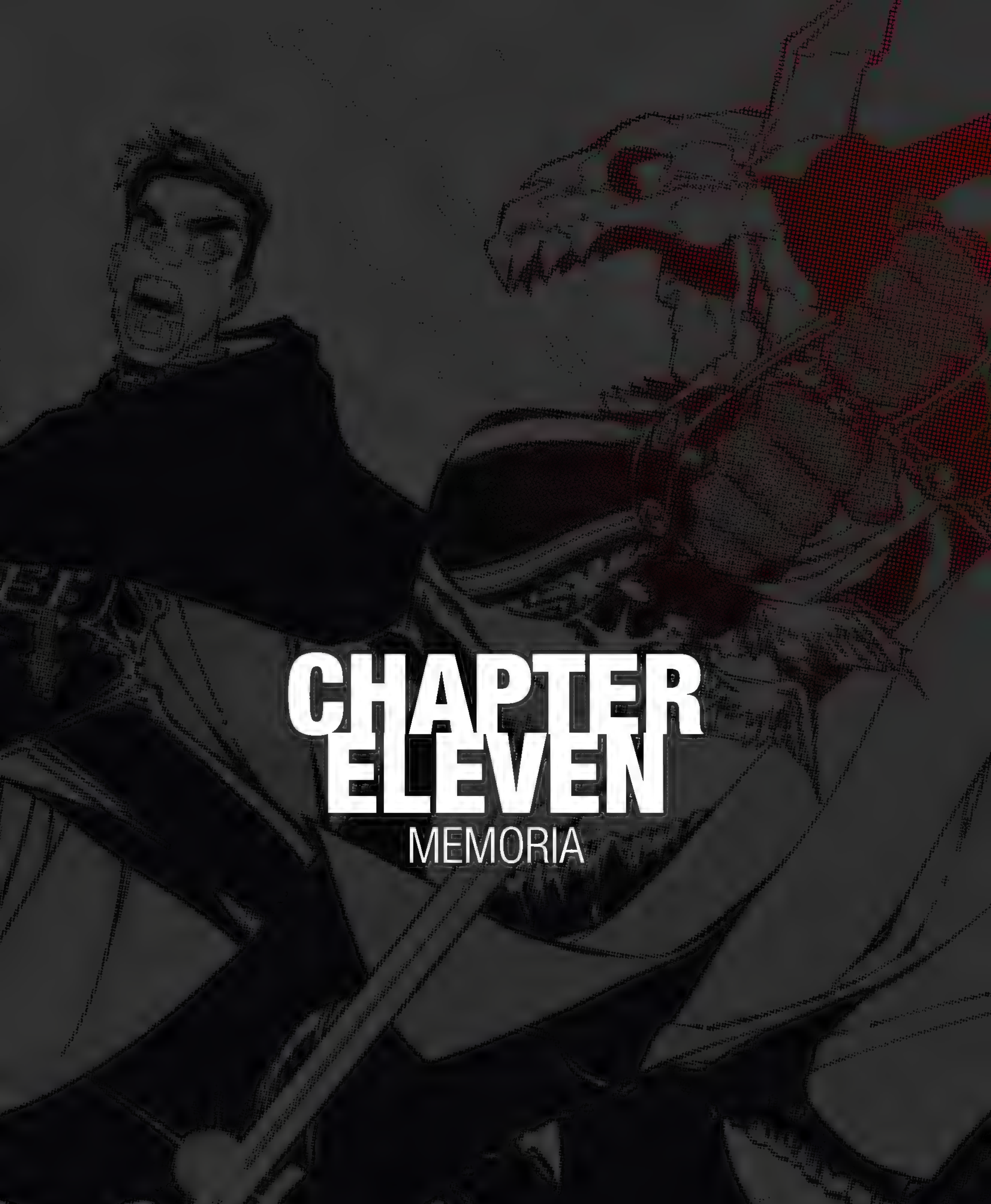
SSHH -- STOP SQUABBLING, I'M WATCHING NIGHT-TIME...

AND THE NUMBER ONE WAY TO TELL THAT VAMPIRES ARE REAL...

...OUR OWN SENATOR VAN FLEET IS A BLOODSUCKING POLITICIAN!

AH... THESE STUPID HUMANS ALWAYS AMUSE ME... FAR TOO "SOPHISTICATED" TO EVEN BELIEVE IN US.

THEY WILL BE SO EASY TO DESTROY!



CHAPTER ELEVEN

MEMORIA

START SPREADING THE NEWS.

THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS...

...IS IN A COMA.

AND ALL THE LIGHTS ON BROADWAY HAVE GONE DARK.

METRO

TODAY JESUS

SOLD OUT

TODAY

PERSTAR

FORGET ABOUT MAKING IT HERE...

STARJACK'S COFFEE

JUST MAKING IT THROUGH THE NIGHT IS TOUGH ENOUGH.

S'FUNNY, ISN'T IT, AZZO? IT'S *HUMANS* -- THE RENEGADE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS, ANYWAY -- WHO'VE TERRORIZED THE *MONSTERS!*

CHICKEN SOUP

EXCEPT *US*, OF COURSE, VAN FLEET -- *WE'RE* STILL WANDERING ABOUT WITH *IMPUNITY.*

OF COURSE, AS THIS STATE'S JUNIOR SENATOR, YOU PROBABLY ENJOY CERTAIN *FREEDOMS,* EH?

FREEDOM FROM BEING *STAKED* THROUGH THE HEART, LIKE MANY OF OUR FELLOW *VAMPIRES,* FOR INSTANCE.

NO -- WHAT'S TRULY AMUSING, IS THAT MISTRESS *LISSETH* HAS THROWN US *TOGETHER* ON THIS --

-- EVEN THOUGH WE'D EACH GLADLY FEED THE OTHER TO THE TEMPLARS IN AN EYE-BLINK.

I WAS MORE THAN *HANDLING* THINGS! SHE TOLD ME TO KEEP THE BOY AND THE GRIGORI APART, SO I CAST SOME *BLACK SPELLS* TO DO JUST *THAT* --

-- WHICH, GIVEN HER DISDAIN FOR SORCERY, IS PROBABLY *WHY* LISSETH SENT ME. SOMEONE'S GOT TO KEEP YOU FROM GOING TOO *NEW AGE.*

HOW COWARDLY, YET TYPICAL, OF YOU TO USE MAGIC --

SKREEE

-- NO *RISK*, NO DIRTY HANDS, NO ACTUAL *EFFORT*!

I'D HAVE JUST GONE TO *EKIMUS* AND RIPPED HIS ANCIENT HEAD *OFF*!

BIG TALK. AND YET THE OLD APE HAS LIVED SO LONG, HMM...?

OKAY, THERE'S A *CURFEW* IN EFFECT ON THESE STREETS -- WHAT MAKES YOU TWO THINK YER ABOVE THE LAW?!

UH-OH -- QUICK, SENATOR, CAST A *SPELL* ON HIM!

SHUT UP. THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO DEAL WITH *THIS*...

THEN WE *AGREE* -- WE'LL HAVE TO GET OUR HANDS *DIRTY*.

NO --!

SIGH

RAARGH!

HUH?!

OH SWEET *JEEZ*, IT'S ALL *TRUE* -- THERE *ARE* MONSTERS *LOOSE* ON THE STREETS!

SCHWURK

FREEZE -- UM, DROP... HIM... N-NOW!

ALL RIGHT, CONSIDER HIM DROPPED! HE WAS EMPTY ANYWAY.

OH... GOD, DANNY?! GET THOSE H-HANDS UP, MISTER -- Y-YOU'RE UNDER ARREST FOR MURDER!

OH, BLAST -- THAT'S RATHER INCONVENIENT. HAVE YOU ANY INFLUENCE HERE, SENATOR?

AHHH... DAMN.

LOOK AT ME, OFFICER, I WANT YOU TO FORGET ABOUT ALL OF THIS...

ARE YOU FREAKIN' NUTS?! I DON'T CARE WHO YOU ARE, I'M NOT TAKIN' ANY CHANCES!

STOP RIGHT THERE, OR I'LL...

...SHOOT!

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

SPRAK

POINTLESS WASTE OF TIME AND ENERGY...

NOW, WASN'T HANDS-ON BETTER THAN DOING IT BY REMOTE-CONTROL MAGIC?

... I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A REAL "LAW AND ORDER" SENATOR, YOU KNOW. WAS THIS REALLY NECESSARY?

ELSEWHERE, ALEX ELDER IS CONSIDERING MORE PRESSING QUESTIONS...

WH-WHERE AM I?! WHAT'S GOING ON?!

AND WHY AM I...?

...NAKED --?!

SCARLET?!

RELAX, *ENFANT*, I SAVED YOU FROM YOUR *TEMPLAR* CAPTORS -- *REMEMBER*?!

WE ARE IN THE HOTEL GUND IN THE EAST VILLAGE -- WE HAVE BEEN HIDING HERE FOR THREE DAYS.

THREE DAYS ALONE WITH YOU -- AND *NAKED*?!

SORRY I *MISSED* IT -- HOW *WAS* I?

STOP, *IMBÉCILE*! THIS IS SERIOUS -- *DEADLY* SERIOUS!

THERE IS A WAR GOING ON IN *NEW YORK*! AND NOW I HAVE *BETRAYED* MY TEMPLAR MASTERS TO SAVE YOU!

THEY WILL BE HUNTING *ME* NOW TOO! MY LIFE HAS NO MORE VALUE THAN A *VAMPIRE*!

UM...

THAT WORTHLESS, EH? HOW AWFUL FOR YOU.

I AM SORRY, ALEX -- I DIDN'T MEAN...

NO NEED TO EXPLAIN -- YOU'RE A ***RED HOOD***, YOU WORK FOR THE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS, YOU ***EXTERMINATE*** VAMPIRE BUGS LIKE ***ME***. THAT'S YOUR ***JOB***.

NO ***MORE***, ALEX! THERE IS NO ***JUSTICE*** IN THEIR CRUELTY -- I WILL ***NEVER*** SERVE THEM AGAIN! NOW I MUST... MUST... I...?!

I DO NOT ***KNOW*** WHAT TO DO, BUT I ***DO*** KNOW I CAN NOT STAY HERE IN THE CITY!

I UNDERSTAND, BUT I CAN'T ***LEAVE***. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ***JOE***, OR ***EKIMUS***...

...AND I HAVE A SERIOUS ***SCORE*** TO SETTLE WITH YOUR EX-BOSS D'ORENSE!

THEN YOU WILL PLAY ***RIGHT*** INTO THEIR HANDS AGAIN, ALEX! THEY ***NEED*** YOU AS A ***WEAPON*** AGAINST ***LISSETH***, THE VAMPIRE QUEEN!

THAT WORKS FOR ME ***TOO!*** I'VE GOT BUSINESS WITH ***HER***, TOO!

DULAC CASTLE. HENLEY-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK.

THE LOCAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE...

IS EVERYTHING TO YOUR LIKING, *SAINT GEORGE* --?

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

A MONTH AGO I WAS A SIMPLE MOUNTED COP IN CENTRAL PARK, AND NOW I'M INHABITED BY THE SPIRIT OF A LONG-DEAD, LEGENDARY *CHRISTIAN WARRIOR.*

NOW I'M BEING DRIVEN ON A CRAZY MYSTERY-QUEST -- AND I'VE LEFT A FAMILY I LOVE BEHIND.

ON THE *PLUS SIDE,* I LOOK PRETTY SHARP IN THIS *ARMOR.*

AH, YES. A *SACRED MISSION* WEIGHS HEAVILY ON THE SOUL...

D'ORENSE...?

...BUT SUCH ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SUCH AS *WE,* EH?

ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE FATHER LIZARRAGA, OUR CHAPLAIN.

IT IS A GREAT HONOR TO MEET SUCH A RENOWNED HOLY WARRIOR.

I SEE YOU HAVE BEEN PERUSING OUR TAPESTRY GALLERY -- HERE IS DEPICTED THE ENTIRE *HISTORY* OF THE *TEMPLAR KNIGHTS...*

...BEGINNING WITH OUR ORIGINS A *THOUSAND* YEARS AGO IN THE HOLY LAND. WE WERE FORMED TO PROTECT CHRISTIAN *PILGRIMS* FROM HEATHENS -- AND *DARK EVIL!*

THE ORDER GREW QUICKLY IN *POWER* AND *WEALTH,* AND SOON DREW RESENTFUL ATTENTION. THE TEMPLARS WERE PRESUMED *DISBANDED* IN THE *TWELFTH CENTURY* BY KING PHILIP OF FRANCE.

IN *FACT,* THE KNIGHTS WERE SIMPLY SEPARATED FROM THE *OFFICIAL* CHURCH, AND USED EVER SINCE AS *SECRET AGENTS* OF THE HOLY FATHER, HIMSELF.

THOUGH WE ARE ACTING ON OUR *OWN* AUTHORITY IN THIS *PURGE* OF NEW YORK.

YAHOO. WHAT'S *ANY* OF THIS TO DO WITH *ME?* AND HOW'D YOU *KNOW* ME ON SIGHT WHEN I BUST IN THE OTHER DAY?

THE TEMPLE KNIGHTS HAVE FOUGHT ALONG SIDE MANY *HEROES,* JOAN D'ARC, RICHARD THE LIONHEARTED...

...AND *SEVERAL* INCARNATIONS OF *YOUR* GREAT SPIRIT, ST. GEORGE. THIS TAPESTRY PORTRAYS BUT *ONE* OF THOSE ENCOUNTERS.

WE RECOGNIZED YOUR HOLY ARMOR, THOUGH WE EXPECTED SOMEONE MORE... *UM...*

WHITE? WELL, APPARENTLY GOD DOESN'T WORRY ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT, GUYS...

...'CAUSE *I'M* DEFINITELY THE MAN... OR *SAINT* -- THOUGH HOW OR *WHY* IS STILL A MYSTERY TO ME.

MAYHAP YOU HAVE BEEN SENT *SPECIFICALLY* TO AID US IN OUR QUEST TO DESTROY *ALL* OF SATAN'S MINIONS...?

MAYHAP. BUT LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE IN MY NUTTY NEW LIFE, I'M NOT GETTING ANY *CLEAR* MARCHING ORDERS FROM ON HIGH.

WELL *OUR* MISSION *IS* CLEAR. AS THE MILLENNIUM APPROACHES, WE MUST DESTROY OUR *SAVIOR'S* ENEMIES IN EXPECTATION OF *HIS* RETURN...

IF YOU'RE *THAT* HOOKED-UP, WHY'D YOU NEED *ME* TO TAKE OUT *EKIMUS?*

AND WHY ARE YOU KEEPING THE ELDER BOY *ALIVE?*

THERE... IS *MUCH* YOU HAVE TO *CATCH-UP* ON, EXCELLENCY. AND MANY PIECES OF OUR GAME THAT NEED TO REMAIN OFF THE BOARD FOR NOW.

WE NEED TO BE *SCRUPULOUS* IN OUR PROGRESS, IF WE'RE TO COMPLETE GOD'S WORK.

BUT THANKS TO *YOU*, WE HAVE CAPTURED THE *GRIGORI* -- THE *FATHER* OF *ALL DEMONS!*

HE HAS NOT YET PROVEN... *COOPERATIVE*, BUT HE *WILL*. ESPECIALLY WITH YOU LENDING YOUR SACRED MAGIC TO OUR CAUSE...

HELLO, DEVILSPAWN. ARE YOU READY TO SHARE WITH US THE DETAILS OF YOUR *WAR-PLAN?*

KNOW THAT WE *WILL* USE YOU, AND *ALEX ELDER* -- AND ANY-ONE ELSE WE NEED -- TO STAVE OFF THE COMING *APOCALYPSE!* HE WILL *NOT* TRIUMPH!

I'VE SPENT SOME TIME WITH THIS ONE -- I'M NOT SURE HE'S *PART* OF WHATEVER THE DEMONS HAVE PLANNED...

... AND SOMETHING ABOUT HIM TUGS AT MY *INHERITED* MEMORY...

WHY NOT *LISTEN* TO YOUR *SAINT*, HUMAN?! SAVE YOURSELF FROM MY *WRATH!*

DO NOT BLASPHEME, SCUM! WHEN HE UNDERSTANDS YOUR DEPRAVITY, ST. GEORGE *WILL* HELP US DESTROY YOU!

ZZAK

ARGH!

DON'T MAKE *THREATS* FOR ME, D'ORENSE.

BEWARE LETTING THE BEAST *SWAY* YOU, YOUR HOLINESS...

ERIC --!

WHEEEEEEEEEEE

NEW YORK IS *CRAZIER* THAN EVER -- IT'S LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A JOHN CARPENTER FILM!

OH -- IS THERE ONE WHERE A *SECRET ARMY* PATROLS THE SHADOWS TO SLAUGHTER CREATURES OF THE NIGHT?

AT *LEAST* ONE. LET'S KEEP MOVING, JOE'S OUT HERE SOME-WHERE!

IT IS *INSANITY*, ALEX -- EVEN NORMAL HUMANS ARE AT RISK IF THEY GET IN THE WAY!

IT IS THIS RANDOM *CRUELTY* AND DERANGED *FERVOR* THAT DROVE ME FROM THEIR RANKS.

UM, THAT *BLACK VAN* COMING THIS WAY --?

VRRMMM

-- IS NOTHING LESS THAN *DEATH!*

INTO THE *SHADOWS*, ALEX!

SKREECH

FIND 'EM -- AND *KILL* 'EM!

I HOPE JOSEPH IS AWAY SAFELY -- THOUGH EKIMUS...

EKIMUS --? WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT THAT *TRAITOR?!*

ALEX, DESPITE HIS TREMENDOUS POWER, EKIMUS WAS CAPTURED BY THE TEMPLARS -- WHEN HE CAME TO RESCUE *YOU!* STOP PLAYING THE INJURED NAIF!

PSSST! 'SCUSE ME --?! HEY --?!

UH... I...

YEAH... IT'S *ME, STELLA* -- OVER *HERE*, STOOPIDS!

YOU GOT ANYTHING TO *EAT?* SOME *CAKE* MAYBE, OR SOME RAVIOLI --? ASPARAGUS EVEN...?

WHOA, *HEY* -- YOU'RE *HIM*, AINT'CHA?

ME? I'M... *WHO?*

TH' DING-BLINKIN' SON OF THE *MONKEY* -- HA! AND *CUTE* TOO!

?!

IGNORE HER, ALEX, SHE IS OBVIOUSLY QUITE MAD...

NAH, I AIN'T THAT *PISSED* YET, BUT I'M GETTIN' THERE -- TELL YOUR BOYFRIEND TO STOP PLAYIN' *THICK*, RED!

YOU'RE THE *CHOSEN ONE*, AINT'CHA BOY?! TH' ONE'S GONNA SAVE OUR SORRY PATOOTS FROM THE COMIN' *DARKNESS* -- RIGHT?!

'COURSE, *I* WOULD'NA CHOSE *YOU* -- *NAH!* I'DA CHOSE THAT GOOD-LOOKIN' *BABE RUTH!* HE'S FAT, BUT *STRONG*.

HASN'T BABE RUTH BEEN *DEAD* FOR, LIKE, *FIFTY YEARS*...?

YOU'D THINK SO, WOULDN' YA?

ANYHOO, I BEEN *WAITIN'* FOR YOU FOR AN *HOUR*, BOY -- YOU'RE *LATE!*

AN *HOUR?* WHAT --?

GET WIT' THE *PROGRAM,* CHOSEN BOY! WHAT HAPPENED AN HOUR AGO?

AIN'T'CHA LOOKIN' FOR THAT NUTTY MEXICAN-INDIAN KID?

WHRRK

JOE --?!

JOE *MAMA!* NOW, ARE YOU COMIN'?

ALL THE *ANSWERS* ARE IN TH' *BARGAIN BASEMENT!*

FUN IN THE SUN

ACAPULCO

HAVE YOU

JUST FOLLOW THE *SUN...*

KREEK

FUN

SU

ACA

VA

INFORMATION

GO ON -- THEY'RE WAITIN' FOR YOU...

UM...?

ALEX! I DO NOT ADVISE THIS! IT MIGHT BE A *TRAP!*

MIGHT BE A *CIRCUS,* TOO, BUT IT AIN'T.

YOU C'N FOLLOW, TOO, OR *NOT.* S'UP TO YOU... *SCARLET.*

...

YOU *KNOW* ME...?!

DAMN.

THIS IS IT -- GET READY!

SKREECH

IT'S A REAL *HONOR* TO HAVE YOU ALONG, SIR -- I'VE NEVER WORKED WITH A *SAINT* BEFORE...

...SO WHAT'S YOUR *BODY COUNT?* I'M AT *136.*

YOU'VE *KILLED 136* PEOPLE?

NAH -- I ONLY DID ABOUT *ELEVEN* PEOPLE -- COLLABORATORS, YOU KNOW. MOSTLY WE'RE TALKING *LOUP GAROU, VAMPIRES, ZOMBIES...* SCUM LIKE THAT...

...OH, YEAH -- AND ONE *TROLL.*

'COURSE, *YOU'VE* WHACKED *DRAGONS* -- THAT MUST'VE BEEN *INTENSE!* I'D *LOVE* TO BAG ONE OF THOSE SCALY BABIES!

SAY, IS IT TRUE YOU CAN TALK TO *BIRDS?* WHAT'S *THAT* LIKE...?

SUDDENLY, IT SEEMS REMARKABLY *STIMULATING.*

EH...?

SACRE...!

WHOS' SHE?

MEAT.

OH --!

NO--!

INDEED... YOU HAVE *LOUP GAROU* BLOOD IN YOUR VEINS...

...I APOLOGIZE FOR MY BROTHER'S RASHNESS -- THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES.

WE SHOULD TALK SOON, RED HOOD -- I WILL BE IN TOUCH...

YEAH, YEAH... LOUPIE -- LEAVE HER ALONE! THE *CHOSEN ONE* WANTS HER!

NO, MAX -- DOWN.

I THINK SHE'S ONE OF *US!*

:SNIF:

'SCUSE ME, MISTER -- HAVE YOU SEEN A WEIRDLY TATTOOED VAMPIRE ANYWHERE?

BAS-*TID* TEMPLARS! CHOPPED US LIKE THEY'S *BUTCHERS!*

WE'RE NOT *ALL* GREEDY BAD GUYS, MOST'VE US 'RE JUS' TRYIN' TO GET BY!

GEEZ, THIS PLACE IS LIKE A CASTING CALL FOR *EPISODE ONE* -- I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY *IMPOSSIBLE* CREATURES IN ONE PLACE...

...AND ALL OF THEM MORE PATHETIC THAN SCARY. DAMNED TEMPLARS ARE THE REAL MONSTERS HERE...!

JOE--?!

STOP LOLLYGAGGING, *CHOSEN-BOY!*

SUCH... DEVASTATION... SO CRUEL -- HOW WILL THESE CREATURES *SURVIVE?!*

A LOT OF 'EM *WON'T*. BUT THE *RACE'LL* GO ON ANYWAYS!

WE EXIST IN *NATURAL BALANCE* WITH THE *DAY-WALKERS* -- WE'RE *NECESSARY!* THESE PSYCHO TEMPLARS'RE THROWIN' THAT BALANCE *WAY* OUTTA *WHACK!*

EXIT

SORT OF A PROBLEM *I'D* EXPECT A *CHOSEN ONE* TO *SOLVE*, BY THE WAY...!

HUMANS SAY WE AIN'T GOT *SOULS*, BUT YOU EVER SEE *THEM* TRY TO *DANCE?!* WE GOT JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO EXIST AS THEY DO!

BOBO...? RED?

JOE! SCARLET TOLD ME THAT YOU GOT... SKEWERED HELPING TO RESCUE ME?!

YEAH, THAT'S ME, THE HEROIC PINCUSHION -- NNGGH!

MUST'VE BEEN HOLY WATER ON THAT BLADE -- DAMN GUTS WON'T HEAL!

NOT QUICKLY, ANYWAY... UUNNN...

YOU GOT THIS COMING FOR ME... I'M REALLY SORRY...

HEY, I WAS JUST FOLLOWIN' EKIMUS -- HEY, HOW'S APE-FACE DOIN'? HE TEAR THE HOUSE DOWN --?

EKIMUS WAS CAPTURED BY THE TEMPLARS. THOUGH, I GATHER THAT ALEX DOES NOT CARE MUCH ABOUT THAT...

THAT'S NOT FAIR! I MAY BE ANGRY AT THE WAY EKIMUS HAS MANIPULATED ME -- BUT I'D NEVER WISH HIM IN THE HANDS OF THOSE KILLERS!

WHAT I DON'T GET IS HOW THEY GRABBED HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE -- HE'S TOO ABSURDLY POWERFUL FOR HUMANS TO HANDLE!

TRUE ENOUGH, THE TEMPLARS ALONE WERE NEARLY SHREDDED BY EKIMUS IN HIS FURY... BUT IN THE END, THEY HAD SUPER-HUMAN ASSISTANCE...

...THE HEAVEN-SENT MIGHT OF...

"... SAINT GEORGE!"

I -- I HAVE NO IDEA, ERIC.

I THOUGHT YOU HAD LIKE A DIRECT LINE TO GOD!

NEW YORK

SO... YOUR HOLINESS -- WHERE TO NOW...?

I GUESS ALL THE CIRCUITS ARE BUSY, THEN. OR MAYBE GOD DOESN'T WANT ALEX ELDER FOUND.

THAT'S JUST BLASPHEMY! GOD WANTS ALL THESE DEVILS EXTERMINATED!

FINE. IF YOU CAN'T HELP -- MISTER SAINT -- WE'LL SCOUR THE ENTIRE CITY...!

...TILL WE FIND THE DEMON-SCUM! EVERYBODY OUT!

SKREEECH

PHIPPS, SHANNON -- HIT THE STREET!

SHUNK

HUH?!

UM... CAPTAIN, SIR?

THERE YA ARE! PUNK'SHOOL AS EVER, EH, GEORGIE?

CRAZY AS SHE IS, WE *NEED* THE OLD WOMAN TO GET US OUT OF HERE -- WHERE'D SHE GO?

I... UH... I DO NOT SEE *HER, MON AMIS...*

... NOT AMIDST ALL THIS... *MADNESS...!*

I THINK WE CAME, UM... *THIS WAY!*

YEAH, THIS IS IT -- FOR ...UH, *SURE...*

BOBO? I THINK SOMEONE... COMES!

WONDERFUL. FRIENDS, D'YOU SUPPOSE?

NON! IT IS THE *TEMPLARS,* ALEX!

CRAP.

RAPIDEMENT! IF THEY FIND *US,* WE ARE *DEAD!*

LISTEN. EVEN FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU WHO'S FACED A SCORE OF WEIRDIES AND FREAKS, THIS HAS GOT TO BE *OVERWHELMING!*

HELL, THEY'RE *"FAMILY"* AND *I'M* FLIPPED -- BUT WE *CANNOT* LOSE IT! WE'LL HANDLE THIS *TOGETHER!*

JOE, YOU GO TO DEEP COVER, WHILE *JULIE* AND I FACE THESE RATHOLES DOWN!

JULIE...?

I WON'T EVEN SEE ME.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE DOUBTED SAINT GEORGE, HIS SNITCH HAS LED US RIGHT TO THEIR *LAIR!*

GEORGE?! THIS *ISN'T* HOW IT'S S'POSED TO GO!

YOU SHOULDA *LOST* THESE IDJITS THERE IN THE TUNNELS!

GEORGE! STOP 'EM!

I DON'T KNOW *YOU*, LADY -- AND I DON'T KNOW *HOW* TO STOP THEM...

AND WHY WOULD YOU *WANT* TO? YOU AND ME, GEORGE, WE LIVE TO *FIGHT*, EH?

CAPTAIN! THE DARKLINGS ARE DEAD AHEAD AT AN ABANDONED STATION!

SOON THEY WILL BE JUST *DEAD.*

NO THING GETS OUT ALIVE!

GRRR... THEY *COME* -- *SCATTER* TO THE DARKNESS, EVERYONE!

WELL, YOU REALLY EFFED THIS ONE UP -- ROYAL, GEORGIE...!

SAINT GEORGE! I WON'T GO DOWN EASILY -- I'LL TAKE YOU APART PIECE BY PIECE IF I HAVE TO!

ALEX --? I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU...

...I GOT INTO THIS TO FIND YOU -- PROTECT YOU, IN FACT.

BUT THAT WAS WHEN I WAS PLAIN OLD GEORGE DAVIS...

...AND I THINK THAT PART OF ME MAY BE GONE FOREVER.

SO, YOU MAY HAVE LOST YOUR HUMANITY? BECOME SOMETHING COMPLETELY OTHER?

BOO-HOO.

WHY ARE YOU WITH THE KILLERS? WHY DID YOU HELP THEM TRAP EKIMUS? WHY DID YOU LEAD THEM HERE?!

I... I DON'T KNOW -- ANYTHING!

I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHO I AM.

F'R CRYIN' OUT LOUD -- I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, IF YA'D JUST LISSEN!

THEN, PLEASE TELL ME WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON!

DON'T CURSE -- YOU'RE A SAINT, F'R CHRIS'SAKE! WHO YOU ARE, IS WHO WE ARE.

YOU ARE ALSO JUSTICE.

JUSTICE WITHOUT STRENGTH IS IMPOTENCE. BUT STRENGTH WITHOUT JUSTICE IS TYRANNY.

THIS IS WHAT MAKES THE TEMPLARS WORSE THAN THEIR PREY.

I... I'VE BEEN *USED.* BUT NO MORE -- THANKS TO YOU...

SKLIIISSSH

THOU SHALT NOT SUFFER A WITCH TO LIVE!

THAT IS THE LAST LIFE I LET YOU BUTCHERS TAKE!

CHOOMP

THRUNCH

OH, SCAR-R-R-LET! WHERE *ARE* YOU?! I SAW YOU IN THE SHADOWS, *VAMPIRE-LOVER!*

YOU'VE LOST YOUR NERVE, TRAITOR!

OH!

YOU SHOULD BE FIGHTING WITH US -- WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!

WE GAVE YOU YOUR WHOLE LIFE -- WHAT HAS THE DEVIL GIVEN YOU?!

UNNN

DIE, HELL-SLUT -- DIE!

SHUT. UP.

SKLSSH

YAAAR!

OH... SWEET... JESUS -- MY EYE...?!

OOOHH... BLOOD...!

MY EYE!

SNARL

GROOM

YAAAAAAHH!

THE TEMPLARS HAVE *LOST?*

THE *BATTLE,* YEAH. THE WAR GOES ON...

MAYBE NOT. I HAVE A... *FEELING* THE TIDE IS TURNING.

I WAS LIED TO, AND I... MADE SOME SERIOUS MISTAKES. I'M SORRY.

S'OKAY. BUT, WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW...

...TO RESCUE A FRIEND.

THE *GRIGORI?* LEAD ON...

THAT'S *ALEX ELDER,* THE *CHOSEN,* HMM? PLAYIN' WITH *FIRE* IS NEVER A GOOD IDEA, BUT WHAT A *HOTTIE* -- *WHOOO!*

LIFE IS ALWAYS INTERESTING, AIN'T IT?

AHHHH... NOTHING LIKE A LITTLE *BATTLE* TO STIR UP THE *BLOOD,* EH?

ESPECIALLY IF IT'S SOMEONE *ELSE'S* BLOOD *HEH-HEH-HEH!*

FUNNY.

LET'S GO FINISH 'EM, EH?

DOOM

BUT STRENGTH WITHOUT JUSTICE IS TYRANNY.

NOBLER THAN THEIR PREY.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CANTUS EXICO

LIKE A DISTANT FLAME, NEW YORK DRAWS DREAMERS LIKE MOTHS --

-- AND IT CRUSHES THEM!

NOW THE CITY IS DARKER, AND THE FLAME DIES ALONG WITH THE DREAMERS AND THEIR DREAMS...

...SOON NIGHTMARES WILL BE ALL THAT REMAINS.

THE TEMPLAR CASTLE IS AHEAD... BUT IT LOOKS AS IF SOMEONE HAS BEEN HERE AHEAD OF US...

SKRUUFF

YES -- YOUR MENTOR EKIMUS DID A LOT OF DAMAGE BEFORE THEY CAPTURED HIM...

...WITH MY MISGUIDED ASSISTANCE. IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE TEMPLARS AND THE DARKLINGS, I WAS TRICKED INTO TAKING THE WRONG SIDE.

IF EKIMUS CAUSED ALL THIS DEVASTATION, I HOPE HE'S STILL ALIVE...!

THE MORE I SEE...

...THE MORE I'M SURE SOMEONE OTHER THAN EKIMUS HAS BEEN HERE TOO. I WONDER IF ANYONE IN THERE IS STILL ALIVE.

ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT, ALEX...

THE SMELL -- SO MUCH BLOOD...!

KREEEEK

SO... DO SAINTS... EVER FEEL AFRAID?

IF YOU MEAN ME, THE ANSWER IS APPARENTLY YES -- AND THEN SOME!

I DON'T FEEL MUCH LIKE A SAINT, THOUGH...

...DESPITE THE FACT THAT I'VE BEEN TAKEN OVER BY THE SPIRIT OF SAINT GEORGE, I STILL FEEL LIKE PLAIN OLD GEORGE DAVIS...

...STUCK IN A DREAM.

I HOPED THAT THIS WAS JUST A TEMPORARY GIG -- THAT I'D FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT AND THEN GO HOME TO MY WIFE AND SON... BUT NOW...?

YEAH... WELL, US VAMPIRES DON'T GET TO GO HOME EITHER.

I... KNOW... SORRY.

WHEN I WAS JUST A COP, I SWORE TO RETURN YOU TO YOUR FAMILY.

<SIGH>

I WAS RIGHT -- ALL THIS DEVASTATION IS NEW. EKIMUS DIDN'T DO THIS...

...BUT WHO?

SOMEONE EVEN WEIRDER -- AND WAITING FOR US IN THE DARK...

?!

WHATEVER IT IS DOESN'T WANT ME. THERE'S A... MAGICAL BARRIER HERE THAT I CAN'T PASS.

WE'VE GOT TO GET THROUGH TO SAVE EKIMUS...!

THE BARRIER ISN'T STOPPING *YOU*, SO I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO START OFF BY YOURSELF...

...BUT ONLY TEMPORARILY -- I *WILL* GET THROUGH SOMEHOW AND FOLLOW!

OKAY... GREAT... THANKS.

THE KID'S SEEN SO MUCH STRANGENESS IN HIS SIXTEEN YEARS --

-- BEING ATTACKED BY VAMPIRES, BECOMING A BLOODSUCKER HIMSELF, CARRYING THE LABEL OF *"CHOSEN ONE"* --

-- AND YET HE JUST *HANDLES* IT AND MOVES ON... MAYBE I OUGHT TO MOAN A LITTLE LESS.

NOW TO GET INSIDE AND *HELP.*

MAYBE I CAN SQUEEZE THROUGH THAT WINDOW...?

...AND DROP SMACK INTO THE *FIRE!*

WUFF -- I'M IN... THE *DUNGEON?!*

AND -- *GOD* -- IT'S A WORSE *SLAUGHTER-HOUSE* THAN UPSTAIRS...

RAARRGHHAH!

...AND SOME... *THING... ANGRY* IS LOCKED UP IN THAT *PIT?*

WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON *HERE?!*

NOW WHATEVER IT IS HAS GONE *SILENT*...

WHAT HAVE THESE IDIOT TEMPLARS GOTTEN INTO?

YOU WON'T TAKE ME, HELLSPAWN!

WH-OOOF?!

SKRUNCH

I HAD *NO* INTENTION OF *TAKING* ANYONE, FOOL --

-- BUT NOW YOU'VE MADE ME *ANGRY!*

NOW *WHY* DID YOU *ATTACK* ME... AND *WHO* ARE Y-*YOU*?!

TEMPLE MASTER D'ORENSE?!

AH, THANK HEAVEN IT IS YOU, SAINT GEORGE! PLEASE FORGIVE MY IMPERTINENT ASSAULT!

I AM DESPERATE -- I ALONE REMAIN *ALIVE* -- OUR FORCES HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY *BUTCHERED* BY THE *MONSTERS* WHO HAVE TAKEN OVER OUR CHATEAU!

WE ARE *LOST*...!

...TOTALLY LOST!

I SMELL *BLOOD* -- *OCEANS OF IT* -- DIRECTLY AHEAD... BUT WHAT AM I WALKING *INTO?*

OH WELL, IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN *DIE* AGAIN -- MIGHT AS WELL BLUNDER HEAD-LONG INTO THE PROPELLER BLADES.

BUT, LORD, THAT *SMELL* -- IT'S JUST GETTING *WORSE!*

UGH -- THE PLACE *REEKS* OF *BLOOD* AND *DEATH* AND *HORROR!* I WONDER IF VAMPIRES CAN *PUKE!*

PRETTY *RIPE*, EH? WE CAN'T SNIFF A *ROSE* ANYMORE --

-- BUT *DEATH'S PERFUME* IS PRETTY *POTENT* -- EH?

YOU STAY IN OUR... *BUSINESS*, YOU'LL GET *USED* TO IT.

SENATOR VAN FLEET?!

YEP. BUT JUST CALL ME VICTOR -- THE *U.S.* GOVERNMENT HOLDS NO SWAY *HERE.*

NOW, FOLLOW ME, SOMEONE'S JUST *DYING* TO MEET YOU.

THAT IS PERHAPS AN OVERSTATEMENT, VICTOR -- WE IMMORTALS CANNOT EASILY DIE, AND I SELDOM EVEN GET IMPATIENT ANYMORE.

STILL, I HAVE BEEN ANXIOUS TO MEET OUR YOUNG CHOSEN ONE -- THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE. AND -- FORGIVE ME, VICTOR -- I THINK THE CUTEST!

YOU'RE CORRECT IN WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, ALEX ELDER. YOU DO INDEED KNOW ME! I HAVE VISITED YOU IN YOUR DREAMS...

...BUT IT'S A GREATER PLEASURE TO MEET YOU IN YOUR LUSCIOUS YOUNG FLESH! WELCOME, ALEX -- I AM LISSETH, THE QUEEN MOTHER OF ALL VAMPIRES!

YOU KNOW VICTOR. THE LONG-FACED FELLOW TO MY LEFT IS COUNT AZZO -- AND YOU DEFINITELY KNOW MY PET EKIMUS, HERE...

ELSEWHERE...

WHERE ARE THEY...?!

YOU KNOW WHERE, SCARLET -- BOBO WENT TO RESCUE APE-FACE FROM YOUR OLD BOSSES, THE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS. THE ONES WHO RAN A SWORD THROUGH ME?!

THANK YOU, JOE -- I HAD FORGOTTEN MY MISBEGOTTEN ROLE IN THIS WRETCHED TRAGEDY.

WELL -- NNNG -- I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN NOTHIN'! IF THIS FRICKIN' WOUND WOULD JUST HEAL, I COULD BE OUT THERE BACKIN' ALEX'S PLAY!

BOY'S TOO YOUNG 'N CRAZY TO PROTECT HISSELF -- UNNNH!

LIE BACK, JOSEPH! YOU NEED TO REST!

YOU ARE ALREADY TOO MUCH TROUBLE -- WHY DID I EVER LEAVE THE ORDER OF THE RED HOOD?!

MAYBE 'CAUSE IT'S AN OUT-OF-CONTROL POSSE, DEDICATED TO OFFIN' VAMPIROS -- LIKE ME 'N ALEX?!

POINT GRANTED, AMI. I HAVE SEEN MORE HUMANITY IN YOU TWO THAN IN THE WHOLE OF THE HOODS -- OR IN THEIR MURDEROUS TEMPLAR MASTERS.

A MOMENT... I THINK I SEE SOMEONE APPROACHING...

...BUT WHO...

...ALEX!?

NON -- GASP!

IT IS THAT LOUP GAROU I MET AT THE DARKLING HOSTEL -- THE ONE WHO SAID I SHARE THE BLOOD OF HIS KIND --

-- THE BLOOD OF THE *WOLF!*

WHAT?!

NOTHING -- IT IS A TRICK OF THE *FOG.* LIE DOWN AND BE QUIET...

WHERE ARE YOUR *MANNERS,* LAD? DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO YOUR *QUEEN?*

NO. I HAVE *PEOPLE* FOR THAT SORT OF THING.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YOU?

...

DID *YOU,* UM, *KILL* ALL THESE GUYS?

YES.

LET *EKIMUS* LOOSE.

EKKIE?! WHY, HE'S NOT *CAPTIVE* -- HE'S FREE TO GO ANYTIME HE *CHOOSES.*

RIIIGHT. AND THE *CHAINS?!*

COULD THOSE FLIMSY BONDS HOLD THE EKIMUS YOU KNOW...?

NO. HE WEARS THOSE AS THE BADGE OF HIS *WILLING* SUBMISSION.

SPEAK UP NOW, BOY -- ARE YOU HERE TO *ATTACK* ME?

I... UH... THINK I *HAVE* TO. I'M THE *CHOSEN ONE...*

HA HA HA HA HA

HOW... *CHARMING!*

HA! ANOTHER CHOSEN ONE?! VAN FLEET CAN TELL YOU HOW BIG A DEAL *THAT* IS!

SHUT UP, IDIOT.

I DON'T CARE *HOW* MANY HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BEFORE -- OR HOW MANY YOU'VE *SEDUCED* TO EVIL!

I'M THE *REAL DEAL* -- AND YOU CAN'T *BUY ME* OFF!

NOW... WHAT CAN *I* DO FOR *YOU?!*

ALEX... YOU *WOUND* ME. I MERELY WANT YOU TO BE *HAPPY.*

WE ARE SO VERY MUCH *ALIKE,* YOU AND I -- IN FACT...

...WE'RE *FAMILY!* NOW, BE NICE FOR... *MOM* AND *DAD.*

... IT'S ALL VERY *FUNNY*, ISN'T IT?

EVERY-THING I'VE BASED MY LIFE ON IS A *JOKE* -- A *LIE! SHE* SHOWED ME THAT...!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? *WHO* IS *SHE*?

LISSETH. BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO EXPLAIN! NO TIME FOR *ANY-THING* ANY-MORE...!

IT'S ALL A *LOST CAUSE* -- EVERY-THING IS ABOUT TO BE *SWEPT AWAY!*

NO *WORLD* -- NO *SALVATION* -- *NO GOD!*

PERHAPS NOT FOR *YOU*, BUT MY FAITH ISN'T *SHAKEN* BY THIS NONSENSE!

FAITH IS NONSENSE!

THERE ARE *FORCES* BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING AT *WAR!* FORCES THAT DO NOT CARE ABOUT US AT ALL!

YOU'RE *CRAZY* -- WHAT ARE YOU --?!

OH MY... *THIS* IS A *COMPLICATION*. *HE'S* BREAKING *LOOSE*...

WHAT?! WHAT IS IT?!

BREAKING LOOSE

TELL ME, D'ORENSE... NOW!
WE CAPTURED HIM TO USE IN THE WAR...
...AND TO USE AGAINST YOU, IF YOU WOULDN'T COOPERATE -- OH, LORD, I'M SO SORRY!
OH MY GOD... I KNOW...!
...IT'S...

...SO SIMPLE, ALEX, DARLING -- WHY WORRY ABOUT AN OLD GOAT LIKE EKIMUS?

JOIN ME AND YOU CAN HAVE *ANYTHING* YOU DESIRE -- OR *ANYONE!*

FREE, AND WITHOUT *STRINGS*, ALEX -- BECAUSE I *LOVE* YOU THAT MUCH!

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS *ASK ME*...

I... I...

YOU EXPECT THIS *CHEESY* SHARON STONE BIT TO WORK ON *ME*? *FORGET IT!*

YOU CAN'T GIVE ME WHAT I WANT! I WANT MY *OLD LIFE* BACK!

DO NOT *DOUBT* ME, LITTLE ONE...

...I... CAN...

NO! GET AWAY FROM *ME!*

NO ONE CAN GIVE ME BACK MY *FAMILY* -- MY *HUMANITY!*

AZZO? THE INSECT HAS *OFFENDED* ME.

OF COURSE, MISTRESS. CONSIDER HIM...

...SQUASHED.

ME. I'VE ALWAYS *HATED* CHOSEN ONES -- WITH THEIR *HOLIER THAN THOU* ATTITUDE...

...HEH.

SNAAARL

ST-STAY *BACK* --!

SKKSSH

ST-STAY *BAAA...* UUNN --

UNNH!

HA HRA

THE BOY ISN'T EVEN A *CHALLENGE!* WHY DID YOU EVER WORRY ABOUT A *NOTHING* LIKE *THIS,* MY QUEEN?!

HE IS FINISHED!

--WHA?!

KRRR NK

CHILDISH ACROBATICS WILL NOT SAVE YOU!

I-I HAVE TO G-GET OUT OF HERE...!

WE'RE NOT LETTING YOU LEAVE, HERO -- NOT IN ONE PIECE!

WHATDOIDO? WHATDOIDO? WHATDOIDO?

WHAT DO I DO?!

YOU DIE!

GRAASSH

UNNNNN--

I AM THE MASTER OF THE DEAD -- JOIN THEM!

SHUUF

AAAH!

GOD HELP ME -- WHAT IS HAPPENING?!
SKAKAAASH
BWOOOOOOOSHH
SKRRIIIITCCHHH
OOOOH -- THAT'S GOING TO LEAVE A BRUISE... WHAT --?!
SCREEAH
DAMN ME, I WAS RIGHT -- IT'S A...

"...A DRAGON!"
HELLFIRE! IF NOT FOR MY BLESSED ARMOR AND SHIELD, I'D BE ASH!
STILL, I'M NOT GOING TO STAND STILL AND TAKE THAT BLAST AGAIN...
...BUT I'M NOT RUNNING EITHER --!
THWAK
RAWOOooo
UFF --!
SHAKT
WHIIISH
THOOWNGH
KRUMMPP
UFFF --!
WOOSH

UNH! HUH!

AH, THE PATHETIC CHOSEN ONE SEEMS TO BE LOSING AT CORPSE TWISTER!

YOU'RE -- UNN -- SO TOUGH, AZZ-HOLE -- HOW COME YOU CAN'T BEAT ME WITHOUT MAGIC?!

YES, AZZO -- ISN'T IT YOU WHO TOLD ME THAT HANDS-ON IS BETTER THAN REMOTE CONTROL? OR IS THAT ONLY WHEN YOU KNOW YOU CAN WIN?

SHUT UP, VICTOR. I NEED NOTHING TO DEFEAT THIS WHELP.

THEN, STOP HIDING BEHIND THESE FLESH PUPPETS...

...RETURN TO DUST, YE MORTAL SHELLS, FLY THE WINDS TO SEVEN HELLS...

KRRRSSHHH

BE GENTLE WITH THE LAD NOW, AZ, OLD BOY...!

RAAAHRR

YOU HAVE NOTHING, BOY...!

IS THIS NOTHING?!

KRAK

LET GO, BOY -- SHOW US WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF.

AND WHAT AZZO IS MADE OF.

NOT A PROBLEM.

WHA-- SOME FORCE LIFTS ME?!

PUT ME DOWN!

...DOWN, SERPENT -- GO DOWN!

CHUK

ARRRRRR

THE FIELDS OF CENTRAL PARK WILL MAKE A FITTING KILLING GROUND!

SLU

RROAAOOARRR

CHOK

GRRRRRR

THAT YOU WILL *DIE* IN THE SHADOWS OF THESE ANTIQUATED *BATTLEMENTS* IS SWEET, *POETIC JUSTICE!*

KUMPP

SWISH

NOT FAST ENOUGH BY HALF -- DEATH STEALS YOUR SWIFTNESS!

KRANNCH

RAAAHRRRRR

YOU CHOSE UNWISELY YOUR *LAST* OPPONENT, DRAGON -- I AM SAINT GEORGE, I STAND FOR GOD AGAINST THE FORCES OF *HELL!*

IT IS WHAT I HAVE ALWAYS DONE. IT IS MY... *PURPOSE.*

YOU COULDN'T COOK AN EGG WITH THAT PALTRY FLAME --

-- AND NOW YOUR WINGS ARE A TATTERED RUIN! GIVE UP, BEAST -- DIE!

SLLSSH

MY COMMISSION COMES FROM HEAVEN ITSELF -- AND WITH IT, THE POWER TO SEE IT THROUGH...

...HOWEVER MANY LIFETIMES IT MAY TAKE.

THRUMPP

CHRUK

THIS BATTLE WAS FOREORDAINED -- IT IS A SIGN!

IT IS MY BAPTISM -- IN THIS INCARNATION!

I AM SAINT GEORGE --

-- AND I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO...!

"...LET HELL *QUAKE* WITH FEAR!"
WHUH-WHUH-WHUH-WHUH...
YOUR LAP DOG COULDN'T *FINISH* ME -- MAYBE YOU SHOULD HANDLE YOUR OWN *DIRTY WORK?!*
YOU CONTINUE TO EXIST BY MY SUFFERANCE ALONE, BOY -- AND YOU HAVE IMPRESSED ME --
-- FOR *NOW.*
MAYBE *WE* SHOULD FIGHT TO THE *DEATH,* TOO -- I'D EITHER DIE, OR WIN BACK MY *HUMANITY!*
HA-HA-HA! DON'T GET COCKY, ALEX -- *I* AM NOT AZZO.
AND IF YOU WANT YOUR LIFE BACK, ASK EKIMUS -- *HE* TOOK IT AFTER ALL.

BUT I DON'T WANT YOU *HUMAN* -- OR *DEAD*, ALEX. I WANT YOU *WITH* ME... *FOREVER!*

SORRY, *NO* -- I'M *BUSY* THEN.

IT'S A GOOD OFFER -- THINK IT OVER. WE HAVE *ETERNITY*, AFTER ALL.

VICTOR, YOU'RE IN CHARGE -- THE BOY HAS SAFE PASSAGE, LET HIM AND THE GRIGORI GO IN PEACE...

...FOR NOW.

IT'S *OVER?* JUST LIKE *THAT?*

"SHE MAY NOT REALIZE IT YET, LAD -- BUT SHE *FEARS* YOU...

"... AND NOW, WITH *GOOD CAUSE.*"

...AND THEN VAN FLEET JUST VANISHED *TOO?* MAN, BOBO -- YOU ARE ONE *LUCKY* LI'L *NINO!*

WATCH IT, JOE -- I AM *CHOSEN*, HEAR ME *ROAR...*

...MY NEW LIFE IS *COSMICALLY WEIRD...* BUT I'M FINALLY STARTING TO FEEL LIKE IT'S *MINE!*

AND, STARTING TOMORROW NIGHT, I'M GOING TO START *LIVING* IT.

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